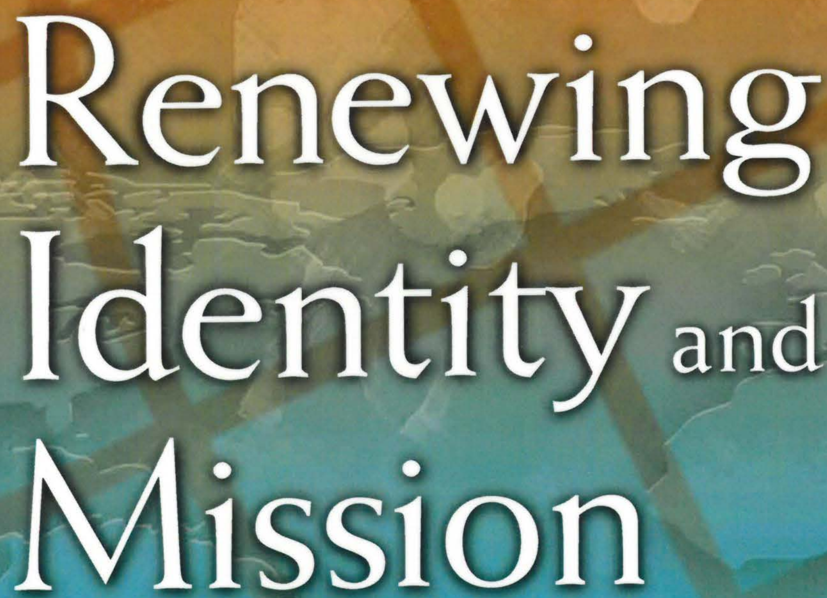

Renewing Identity and Mission

MENNONITE BRETHREN REFLECTIONS AFTER 150 YEARS

EDITED BY ABE J. DUECK, BRUCE L. GUENTHER, and DOUG HEIDEBRECHT

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Winnipeg, MB Goessel, KS

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Introduction

The 150th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren provides an opportunity to reflect critically about the journey they have travelled as well as the path they are on now. Since their beginning on January 6, 1860, the recurring themes of identity and mission emerge in their attempts to articulate the center that holds Mennonite Brethren together. As Mennonite Brethren look to the future, there is the recognition of the continuing need for God's renewal.

This book emerges out of "Renewing Identity and Mission: A Mennonite Brethren Consultation," which took place July 12-14, 2010 on the campus of Trinity Western University (Langley, BC), where Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary has been a partner within the ACTS Seminaries consortium since 1999. Over three hundred people gathered to engage in conversation around thirty presentations prior to Celebration 2010, which commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren. The two evening plenary sessions provided a global perspective with presentations by representatives from Paraguay, India, Congo, Colombia and Germany. Alfred Neufeld, the newly appointed Rector of the Evangelical University of Paraguay, gave the plenary address entitled, "Recovering Apostolic and Prophetic Origins and Identity: Revisiting the Meaning of Mennonite Brethren Dissent in 1860."

Already in October 2008 Paul Toews, Director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California, approached the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission with a proposal for an academic conference in light of the upcoming 150th anniversary. The initial planning group, led by Ken Reddig and including Peter Klassen, Abe Dueck and Doug Heidebrecht, extended a call for papers relating to the theme, "Renewing Identity and Mission." They then decided to link the consultation with the Celebration 2010 event sponsored by the US and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conferences.

The purpose of the consultation was to explore and assess how the journey of the Mennonite Brethren related to where God was calling them in the future. The intent was to promote continuing conversa-

tion among Mennonite Brethren by addressing some of the critical issues facing the church in North America as well as reflecting on how Mennonite Brethren identity and mission has been informed and shaped by the perspective of the international community (ICOMB). The event was designed to provide an opportunity for conversation, involving both church leaders and teachers, with the goal of integrating Mennonite Brethren theology and practice. Further, the consultation sought to facilitate hearing new and younger voices from Mennonite Brethren churches.

During the summer of 2009 a survey was conducted involving pastors from the US and Canada, regarding what they considered to be the most significant issues facing Mennonite Brethren in four areas: identity, theology, church practice and mission. These results focused the choice of topics addressed at the consultation. The planning committee, now chaired by Heidebrecht and consisting of Historical Commission members, Klassen and Dueck, invited the Boards of Faith and Life to participate in the planning process. Representatives Tim Geddert (US) and Ken Peters (Canada) along with Michelle Penner, event planner for Celebration 2010, contributed significantly as participants of the planning committee.

Seventeen presentations from the "Renewing Identity and Mission Consultation" are included in this collection. Alfred Neufeld's plenary address introduces these presentations by challenging Mennonite Brethren to embrace God's apostolic and prophetic call on them. The remaining chapters are arranged in three sections: historical, theological and missional reflections.

The historical reflections begin with Valerie Rempel's review of four approaches to telling the Mennonite Brethren story, which sets the stage for Bruce Guenther's exploration of how Mennonite Brethren have wrestled with their complicated dual evangelical Anabaptist theological identity. Abraham Friesen then takes another look at the religious influences that shaped Mennonite Brethren beginnings. Larry Warkentin's examination of Mennonite Brethren worship practices expressed in their hymnody and Jonathan Janzen's reflections concerning the Mennonite Brethren struggle to practice peacemaking examine in more detail several Mennonite Brethren convictions.

Introducing the theological section is Doug Heidebrecht's reflections on the role of the *Confession of Faith* within the life of the church. Two core Mennonite Brethren convictions are again addressed, first in Tim Geddert's examination of how the Scriptures function as the

final authority for faith and life, and then in Andrew Dyck's exploration of the Mennonite Brethren understanding of personal conversion. The last two presentations in this section explore Mennonite Brethren ecclesiology. First, César Garcia reflects on a Latin perspective of a radical approach to the church and then Brad Sumner and Keith Reed describe one Canadian congregation's experience of practicing community hermeneutics.

The final section, missional reflections, begins with Ray Harms-Wiebe's challenge that Mennonite Brethren mission strategy must start with an understanding of the "Who" of mission. The next three chapters provide a contextual analysis of Mennonite Brethren in mission: Lynn Jost examines how Mennonite Brethren preaching bridges the gap between the biblical text and contemporary context; Sam Reimer surveys Mennonite Brethren missional practices in Canada in comparison with other evangelical Protestant denominations; and Richard Lougheed reflects on Mennonite Brethren mission strategy in Quebec. The two final chapters take a look at engaging the next generation: Gil Dueck explores the implications of a new developmental stage—emerging adulthood—for Mennonite Brethren discipleship and Rebecca Stanley looks at Mennonite Brethren attempts to reach out to students within a public university in Canada.

Our hope is that this collection will continue to facilitate reflection and prompt conversation about the issues facing Mennonite Brethren as they seek to be the people of God and take part in God's mission in the world.

The editors wish to thank the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission for their vision and support for this project. Andrew Dyck, in his new role as Executive Secretary, was very helpful in facilitating the publishing process. We also wish to thank each of the presenters at the Renewing Identity and Mission Consultation for inviting participants to participate in critical reflection and encouraging ongoing conversation. In particular, we appreciate the additional effort that contributors to this volume made as they revised their presentations for this format. We are grateful for the excellent work of Elenore Doerksen, manager of Kindred Productions, Marilyn Hudson, copy editor and Fred Koop, designer.

Abe Dueck
Bruce Guenther
Doug Heidebrecht (Chair)

Recovering Apostolic and Prophetic Origins and Identity: Revisiting the Meaning of Mennonite Brethren Dissent in 1860

Alfred Neufeld

Introduction

Mennonite *Aussiedler* or *Russlandrückwanderer* (Mennonites from Russia who settled in Germany in recent decades) love to trace their origins back to the apostolic church. Most of them are heirs of a renewal movement in southern Russia during the 1860s, but some are also the fruit of an indigenous Soviet Union renewal during the 1950s. They are in good company with early Anabaptists who shared a similar understanding of church history: Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* moves from Stephen's martyrdom through to the faithful disciples of Jesus in medieval and renaissance Europe right up to the Anabaptist martyrs.

Recovering the apostolic and prophetic origins might be the one real challenge that can be saved for the future when celebrating 150 years of Mennonite Brethren history. And it might be the most genuine way to honor those first eighteen individuals who, on January 6, 1860, left (or perhaps were asked to leave) the Mennonite Church in South Russia.

When analyzing the institutional health of a movement, the *SWOT* analysis is often used to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is evident that the Mennonite Brethren have had their share of weaknesses from the beginning. And there might also be dangers for the Mennonite Brethren Church in the present and the future. But I prefer an approach called "strength assessment," or as Edgar Stoesz describes it, "doing good better." It is far more edifying to wonder what Mennonite Brethren have done well in the past. Now, that will not lead to a proud hagiography, but to the consciousness that God has entrusted Mennonite Brethren some precious jewels, some

considerable talents, so that they might multiply them and do things better in the future.

I grew up within the all-Mennonite ecumenical commonwealth of immigrant churches in Paraguay (Friedensfeld) and Uruguay (Gartental). Our weekly prayer meetings and town worship services for the whole community were held in the Friedensfeld elementary school, which included people from the Mennonite Church, the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood and the Mennonite Brethren Church, plus those few village Mennonites who dared not to belong to any church. In Gartental my dad, a school teacher from the Mennonite Church who married a girl from the Mennonite Brethren Church, insisted that we should regularly go to the Mennonite Brethren one Sunday and to the Mennonite Church on the next Sunday because he was a school teacher for both groups.

In my own church leadership career in Paraguay I have been a committed Mennonite Brethren Church member, holding offices in the *Ältestenrat* (Faith and Life Commission) and being in charge of the education of the future pastors and missionaries of our Spanish and German Conferences. At the same time, I have held many responsibilities within the all-Mennonite and the all-Protestant environment of the Paraguayan churches. At the present, it is my privilege to chair the Board of the Protestant University (*Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay*) and the Paraguayan National Council of Evangelical Churches, as well as be an Executive Committee member of the Global World Evangelical Alliance and the chairperson of the Mennonite World Conference Commission of Faith and Life. It is not that I am "hunting for presidencies," as a good friend once wondered, rather it is just to give personal testimony to that part of the Mennonite Brethren identity which has always stretched toward the wider body of Christ, and was careful not to consider themselves the only true church (*allein seligmachende Kirche*).

Holding in creative tension specific Mennonite Brethren convictions and an all-Mennonite Anabaptist identity has been a stimulating challenge. I would like to offer three perspectives that might help Mennonite Brethren make sense of their 150-year history: (1) the Mennonite Brethren wanted to recover the essential nature of the church; (2) they wanted to recover the existential dimension of salvation; and (3) they wanted to recover the transcultural mission of the Holy Spirit.

The Community of Scholars and the Essence of Mennonite Brethren Dissent in 1860

Years ago Calvin Redekop published a stimulating essay called "The Community of Scholars and the Essence of Anabaptism."[1] Because Calvin has been my mentor and was the only Mennonite Brethren among the seven people who formed the legendary "Concern Group" that was "cooking the Anabaptist goose" in post-war Europe, I dare to borrow his title.[2] Looking into existing literature, many efforts have been made to grasp and interpret the essence of the Mennonite Brethren dissent in 1860 and to characterize the identity of the emerging Mennonite Brethren Church. In the following, I will try to summarize the findings of some representative scholars. The list is by no means exhaustive.

P. M. Friesen: All Church Members Should be Authentic Believers

It can be refreshing and prophetic to grasp the attitude of historian P. M. Friesen, whose large work summarized the first fifty-year legacy of Mennonite Brethren dissent.[3] At times he articulates strong self-criticism, as J. B. Toews shows:

> The demand that non-Mennonite Brethren individuals be rebaptized by immersion as a prerequisite for marrying Mennonite Brethren members, reflects a dogmatic rigidity of which the Mennonite Brethren have been guilty in too many areas. Here and in other questions of faith and practice we may well join Friesen in his confession when he states: "The Mennonite Brethren Church could not grasp the fact—O we thick of head and narrow of heart—that not everyone else was convinced that we knew it all and had nothing worthwhile to learn from anyone else."[4]

P. M. Friesen is clear that Mennonite Brethren dissent was more or less an "imposed exodus."[5] He seems to draw some parallels between Menno's departure from the Catholic Church and the Mennonite Brethren dissent in 1860. The major area of tension between the old and the renewed understanding of church life for Friesen was the concept of "redemptive faith" and the concept of "community discipline."[6]

Mennonite Brethren Confession (1902): Confessional Continuity- and Protest against Church Practices

I agree with Abe Friesen (personal dialogue) that the first official Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith (1902) is one of the most beautiful creedal documents produced in their short history. A careful reading reveals much about Mennonite Brethren identity and distinctives. According to its introductory notes the essence of the 1860 dissent was not doctrinal, but a desire for greater coherence between faith and life.

> As it has repeatedly been emphasized in the Mennonite Brethren Church, it is once again being repeated today: In 1860 and in the following years our new organization did not refrain from denominational fellowship with Mennonite churches in Russia that advocated the believers' baptism, but our Brethren organization protested against named assemblies in particular because of their practice of baptism and church discipline, and, inspite of the cordial, fraternal fellowship that we still enjoy with many in your assembly, it does so even today.[7]

But Mennonite Brethren also see a continuity and even communion with the other evangelical Anabaptist churches: "The doctrinal differences, in particular in regard to military service, are preventing the church of the Mennonite Brethren from merging with other evangelical churches that advocate believers' baptism."[8] Amazingly, the Mennonite Brethren retained a non-resistant peace position despite the strong influence within the Mennonite Church in Russia of the Prussian Mennonites who had dropped this article from their Confession.

The Mennonite Brethren remained dedicated in article nine and "non-resistance, love of enemies and the kingdom of God." Here they gather a beautiful medley of Jesus' words, exhorting each other to love enemies, to bless and pray for those that curse and offend them, to feed and give drink to enemies, to be willing to suffer, to follow patiently the footsteps of Jesus, who was without sin in the things others made him suffer. And then they have a wonderful statement relating non-resistance to the inbreaking kingdom of God:

> Yet, our longing, praying and working should be increasingly focused on the kingdom, prophesied by Christ and his apostles, a kingdom that God will establish from heaven through his Son Jesus Christ, in whom he has determined it, a kingdom where no one may cause harm nor learn to fight wars, where justice, love and peace will reign.[9]

The 1902 Confession of Faith also contains a foundational statement about creedal texts and biblical theology. This could be expressed today by saying that systematic theology and a confession of faith are always contextual and a fallible human enterprise, not inspired in the way Holy Scripture is:

> These biblical passages are *in* the text; they are not *under* the text. This means: the words of the "confession" are to be understood in the same way the inspired Words of God express certain truths, or: our "confession" does not position itself *alongside* but *under* the Scriptures.[10]

J. F. Harms: Acting According to Scripture

J. F. Harms remembers the first fifty years of the Mennonite Brethren experience in North America by stating: "The MB's, of course, wanted to continue being Mennonites, something their occasional adversaries at that moment tried to deny them. They had no interest in implementing new forms at the beginning, but just called for "conversion, public prayer and great joy in the Lord...Adversaries called it a fanatic flight of fancy..."[11] In his opinion, the dissenters had a very clear goal (*Die klare Absicht der Brüder*): Although called "enthusiasts" by some they wanted to act according to Scripture:

> We would all have preferred to stay in our own congregations, but since the teachers, as we explained in the writing from January 6, did not act according to the Word of God, we are unable to do so on the basis of conscience and wish to form our own congregation as Mennonites.[12]

J. H. Lohrenz: Spiritual Awakening and Newness of Life

The first official self-representation of the Mennonite Brethren Church written in English by J. H. Lohrenz in 1950 indirectly coins two concepts that have prevailed ever since in the self understanding of Mennonite Brethren dissent: spiritual awakening and newness of life. Since they had come to a newness of life, they sought for a deepening of the same and for fellowship with those of kindred mind. They called themselves "Brethren," and by those resenting the movement they were called "Brethren" in derision.

The Mennonite Brethren revival movement was fraught with some manifestations that were not altogether commendable; it was, therefore, misunderstood by many and severely judged by some. It must, however, be admitted that this spiritual awakening was the most profound and far-reaching movement of its kind in the history of the Mennonite colonies in Russia. The entire Mennonite Church was affected by it, and to the extent that it responded to God's manifestations of grace, it shared in the blessings bestowed. Under the prevailing circumstances it was only natural that the movement would lead to the formation of a new church body.[13]

A. H. Unruh: Who belongs to the Believers Church?

In his one-hundred-year anniversary volume featuring the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church, A. H. Unruh quotes extensively from Franz Isaak's *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (1908). He says Isaak's judgment is too harsh, condemning the ban and avoidance (*Kirchenbann* and *Wirtschaftsbann*), which Mennonite Church leaders applied to several dissenting brothers. But in a section called "Anmerkungen A.H. Unruh," he offers his own conviction that the real question in 1860 was: Who belongs to the Believers' Church? "The author's judgment can be characterized as 'harsh,' since the elders had not abandoned the clause within the catechism stating that only believers and penitents may partake of communion. It was rather the fallacy of treating all members as believers."[14]

J. A. Toews: "Both Positive and Negative Terms" within Mennonite Brethren Origins and Identity

As Paul Toews states,

> the publication of John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* in 1975 is the singularly significant event of this historical renaissance. It is the first authorized history of the Mennonite Brethren written in the English language...None other is as comprehensive or as analytical as Toews. He is clearly the dean of Mennonite Brethren history.[15]

This collection of brilliant essays, in honor of J. A. Toews' *magnum opus*,

> point to the doubleness of Mennonite Brethren life... They clearly move away from the...preoccupation with institutional, doctrinal, structural and formal history to one that is culturally, sociologically and ethnically oriented...That contextualization may be troubling, for it does suggest that even at the valued points of our experience and identity we do take cues, styles, and theologies from the social context. The tradition's commitment to Biblicism, which is a recurring theme of these essays, has to be matched by an understanding of its moorings in culture. Gaining this cultural/historical perspective is critical for achieving a clearer self understanding.[16]

John A. Toews analyzes the Mennonite Brethren past in both positive and negative terms, and gives a three-point assessment for each side. Positively, he affirms the Mennonite Brethren emphasis on a practical biblicism, the church as a covenant community and its strong missionary concern. Biblicism seems to be the center piece: "our early brethren certainly could be called a congregation of 'radical Bible readers.' They read the Scriptures, not in order to construct a theological system, but to find answers for Christian faith and life."[17] Toews definitely links Mennonite Brethren renewal to the original Anabaptist movement. In his essay, "The Congregation as Radical Bible Readers," he defines the nature of Anabaptist biblicism as follows:

> First it consisted of a new understanding of the authority of Scripture...There was also a strong aversion to rigid dogmatism...Anabaptists preferred biblical terminology...They accepted a closed canon, but not a closed theological system...The greatest difference in the Anabaptist

> understanding of Scripture however was their view of the progressive nature of revelation. One of their favorite passages…was…the all-encompassing influence of love… The Anabaptists also had a great appreciation for the Sermon on the Mount…The last word of God, they felt, was always spoken by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament.[18]

On the negative side of Mennonite Brethren identity John A. Toews identifies

> an almost complete internalization of the Christian faith among our early brethren…Another negative tendency among our brethren of the past was a tendency toward isolation…Closely connected with isolation was an inclination toward legalism. We have defined sin very often in terms of acts rather than in terms of attitudes and disposition…Moreover, we have in the past also displayed a negative attitude toward culture. Mennonites in general, and Mennonite Brethren in particular have manifested a certain *Kulturfeindlichkeit*, a certain cultural narrowness, both in education and in the fine arts…As a result of our *Kulturfeindlichkeit* we have often robbed ourselves of a richer Christian life and of a more effective witness. We have not used cultural tools for an effective propagation of the faith and for sharing our Christian concerns with others. The intellectual horizon of many of our brethren has often been very narrow.[19]

H. S. Bender and C. J. Dyck: Mennonite Brethren and Anabaptism – 1525 Revisited in 1860?

Two prominent theologians and historians outside Mennonite Brethren circles, Harold S. Bender and Cornelius J. Dyck, point strongly toward the element of continuity between the Anabaptists in 1525 and the Mennonite Brethren dissent in 1860. In his jubilee speech in Winnipeg, Harold S. Bender not only evokes his great friendship with the Mennonite Brethren ecumenical leaders, C. F. Klassen and P. C. Hiebert, but encourages Mennonite Brethren to

bring to the common Mennonite table their special historic gifts, avoiding temptations toward separatism.[20]

Cornelius J. Dyck concludes that "immorality of members in good standing in the church" as well as "blind traditionalism" caused the Anabaptist secession in the sixteenth century and Mennonite Brethren secession in 1860. "Yet the nature of the church, the lack of discipline, the failure of the clergy were the primary concerns both in 1536 and in 1860...The separation of 1860 was a revisitation of 1525 in the rejection of secular authority, albeit Mennonite, over spiritual things."[21] Dyck also states that

> the *document* (January 1860) is...more organizationally than theologically oriented and stands in considerable parallel to the Schleitheim articles of 1527...It is interesting to note how much more irenic it is in tone than Menno's polemic. Also, although Menno does not tire of identifying himself as a miserable sinner, the *document* is by far the more modest of the two.[22]

Dyck's conclusion, very much in line with Harold S. Bender's speech in Winnipeg, urges toward love and church unity, but also paints the reality of church history in a wonderful way:

> Few schismatics have set out deliberately to destroy the unity of the church. Their descendents see them not as schismatics but as pioneers of the faith. Those who defend the *status quo* are seen as the real schismatics. An assorted combination of social, economic, political, personal and, above all, spiritual motives have always been involved. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Holy Spirit appears to bring disunity as well as unity to the church, though his primary gift is love. This is the tragedy and, perhaps, the necessity of the endless chain of schisms in the church. Undue concern over schisms may reflect an over-institutional view of the church as well. In the inscrutable wisdom of God it appears that he is able to add glory to his name not only *in spite* of these schisms, but often *because* of them. 1860 would be a case in point.[23]

G. W. Peters: Pietistic in Spirit, Mennonite in Dogmatics, Baptist in Organization

G. W. Peters describes the Mennonite Brethren as thoroughly committed to old Anabaptist foundations. They kept being Mennonite in dogmatics and ethics. Yet due to new winds and influences, piety, eschatology and probably missions were shaped by pietism while congregational structures and procedures as well as organizing principles were copied from the Baptists.[24]

J. B. Toews: A Phenomenon of Renewal

The most authorized voice of the late-twentieth century to interpret the essence of Mennonite Brethren identity might be J. B. Toews. His volume, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860-1990*, was a lifelong process that led many to remember him as a spiritual father, mentor, professor, friend and strategist. "The process brought me both, enrichment and pain. The enrichment came as I was able to immerse myself in the spiritual pilgrimage of my own people, and see it as a testimony of God's mercy and grace…The pain was felt deeply in the recognition of our imperfections and weaknesses."[25]

In the first chapter, J. B. Toews describes the Mennonite Brethren as a phenomenon of renewal. In the next eight chapters he becomes more specific: Mennonite Brethren are a people with a "bibliocentric faith" that includes a particular understanding of salvation and baptism, of the New Testament character of the church, of leadership and teaching ministry, and of being in the world but not of the world. He describes the Mennonite Brethren as a missionary movement, with a strong, but not homogenous emphasis on eschatology.

J. B. Toews takes for granted that there is a definite continuum between sixteenth-century Anabaptism and the Mennonite Brethren renewal:

> The early Mennonite Brethren saw themselves as the bearers of the Anabaptist movement, an echo from the sixteenth century. The relationship of 1860 to 1525 has been well established. Cornelius J. Dyck referred to the 1860 event as "1525 Revisited." John A. Toews provided further analysis of the linkage between the two movements.[26]

The "phenomenon of renewal" and painful secession was driven by external circumstances:

> Nineteenth-century Mennonitism, in both Russia and North America, hungered for a new vitality, an energizing piety, more intentional conversion and a renewed discipleship. In Russia P.M. Friesen thought that "the good house of Menno had become practically desolate and empty and was about to collapse." The old church, however, resisted the new currents sweeping through the Russian Mennonite colonies. Secession rather than reform, schism rather than cooperation became necessary as the differing currents carried Mennonites towards differing kinds of faith understandings.[27]

Of course J. B. Toews admits the presence of outside forces that he considers a "mixed blessing": "outside influences left both, negative and positive imprints."[28] Pietism, a positive influence, emphasized "personal salvation" and the "fellowship of all true believers," and, most of all "the missionary vision and motivation . . . provided the heartbeat for the Mennonite Brethren movement. If growth had come only from within the Mennonite communities, the missionary outreach, which became a central purpose of their being, might not have occurred or possibly with less fervor."[29] According to Toews, pietism also had a questionable influence:

> The "benefit" of its rigid eschatology is open to question. More visibly negative was Pietism's casual approach to whole life discipleship and the peace teachings of Jesus. Furthermore, Pietism was rooted in the state churches of Germany and England; national patriotism and unconditional obedience to the state were part of their basic theological orientation. This influence diluted the long-standing peace stance of the Mennonites.[30]

It is comforting to know that someone like J. B. Toews, who could be called "Mr. MB," in his "summary observations" on Mennonite Brethren beginnings and identity, has two rather important paragraphs on "human failure and God's mercy" and on "amazing grace." "Though earthen vessels, fragile and inadequate, with many flaws and

imperfections, the early Mennonite Brethren nonetheless became the catalyst to call people back to faithfulness in belief, walk and service."[31]

John B. Toews: Protest Against Religious Totalitarianism and a Revolution of the Poor?

John B. Toews' synthesis in his book, *Perilous Journey: The Mennonite Brethren in Russia 1860-1910*, might be summarized in the title of chapter six, "New Horizons and Old Values."[32] But in *Pilgrims and Strangers* he makes some additional, thought-provoking observations. When Hans Jürgen Goertz identified "anticlericalism" as one of the main driving forces of the Anabaptist dissent in 1525 (*Pfaffenhass und gross Geschrei*), he was not far away from what John B. Toews calls the protest against "authoritarian leadership," "intellectual and spiritual attrition," and even "a revolution of the poor." Especially the evident abuse of authority by the Mennonite Church (*Kirchengemeinde*) elders, as well as some "economic totalitarianism" and the "Mennonite marriage of church and state" were targets of critique for the dissident brethren. John B. Toews comes to a rather moderate conclusion:

> Were the forces of continuity stronger than the forces of change? On the whole the movement did not demonstrate the characteristics normally associated with revolution. There was no cataclysmic or overt action generating radical political and social change. The secession document was not a drastic innovation radically altering existing institutions and society. Most of the religious experiences precious to the nonconformists were rooted in the spiritual legacy of their own community. Why not speak of the evolution of the Brethren? Why not argue for the element of continuity in 1860? Certainly this minimizes the uniqueness of the Brethren as religious innovators, but would it not be historically more honest?[33]

Johannes Reimer: Early Charismatics Soon to be Silenced

Among the newer interpretations, the voice of Johannes Reimer should be heard. He is one of the few who knows the Russian, European and American Mennonite Brethren context thoroughly. He brings a new perspective to the discussion of the Mennonite Brethren dissent

in 1860. The broad word *Erweckung* (renewal), is defined partly as *soteriogene Gemeindepraxis*, that is, church work with a strong evangelistic missionary identity. He definitely values the very spirited movement of the *Huepfer* and *Fröhliche* (exuberant movement) more positively, analyzing the exchange of documents between the original dissidents with the inspector Andrea of the Jekaterinowslav area.[34] He argues that the gifts of the Spirit (Eph. 4:11-14) and the presence of the Spirit of God were the crucial driving forces of the renewal movement: "Our main studies are focused on the lessons of the Holy Spirit. We ask God for his Holy Spirit so that our minds may be enlightened."[35]

Apart from soteriological church practice and rediscovery of the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, Reimer adds a third characteristic: individual access to the experience of salvation and assurance of salvation. According to Reimer, not only Catholics, but also Lutherans and Mennonites saw salvation from the perspective of the church or local congregation. "Salvation has never been understood as purely individual. Yet, this is exactly what Wuest is proclaiming. His word was a word to the individual...Since Wuest the question of appropriating salvation and the question of the assurance of salvation within Russian-German Free Churches have become personal matters to be decided by the individual."[36] With Wuest salvation became a personal question for each individual.

Reimer views the famous June Reform rather critically. Condemning the teaching on freedom from the law (*Freiheitslehre*) of Eduard Wuest seems to have been a medicine more damaging than the sickness of the *Fröhliche* itself:

> Legalism, which to this day is a pervasive tendency within Russian-German churches, is rooted here. *Sola gratiae*, which Wuest proclaimed so clearly, has been weakened significantly, and a specific Mennonite salvation imperative has been assigned to it, which seems to bring the appropriation of salvation dangerously close to being justified by works.[37]

This also had strong consequences for liturgy. After June 1865 the use of drums, exuberant body language and expressions of joy and freedom were forbidden in favor of church order. Mennonite Brethren authorities such as P. M. Friesen ("Henceforth the...MBC...became increasingly Mennonite puritanical, somewhat gloomy and formalisti-

cally and ascetically pious rather than ecstatic.") and A. H. Unruh (*Gefühlskälte und Formalismus*), indicate that a concern for order became characteristic of Mennonite church services, which are not a good substitute for joy.[38] Reimer shows that the search for order and Arminian *Werkgerechtigkeit* (works righteousness) linked to the later *Deutschtum und Ethnokonfessionalismus* (identification with German culture and ethnicity) were not healthy ingredients for the missionary existence and the mental/spiritual health of later Mennonite Brethren.[39]

H. D. Giesbrecht: Keeping Body and Soul Together

What Frank Epp positively affirmed in J. A. Toews' *magnum opus* on Mennonite Brethren history,[40] Heinz Dieter Giesbrecht tries to do in a stimulating paper read at the recent "Historisches Symposium" celebrating the 150th anniversary at Oehrlinghausen. Based on the research of his doctoral work on diaconal theology and practice in the Mennonite Paraguayan experience, he shows that right from the beginning Mennonite Brethren repeatedly emphasized that evangelism and social responsibility, missions and services belong together.[41]

Abraham Friesen: Breaking with the Corpus Mennoniticum

Abraham Friesen is clear and maybe even harsh when he states that from 1800 until 1905 Mennonite politics in Russia basically aimed to preserve the great *Privilegium*. The entire Mennonite commonwealth (*corpus mennoniticum*) was mobilized. The Mennonite Brethren dissent in 1860 created a break in this "corpus" by questioning the model of the "mixed church" of believers and non-believers.

> Nonetheless, the Mennonite policies in Russia from 1800-1905 could be characterized as a political policy to conserve the Great Privilege, since it consisted mainly in the submission of requests to preserve their privileges when a new czar ascended the throne…This religious and ethnic community was also a political community that governed itself. Secluded from greater society, church and state worked together with little supervision from the Russian government. Thus, on a smaller scale the Mennonite church and Mennonite state merged to form one *corpus mennoniticum*, which, in the year of 1860 when the Men-

> nonite Brethren broke away from this *corpus*, saw itself as a "mixed" church, to use the words of the Lutheran state church, a church that included wheat as well as weeds. In 1860 the Elder Lenzmann from Gnadenfeld justified the Mennonite Church by referencing this parable; later conferences have confirmed it in their resolutions, and the Elder Heinrich Dirks has reworked it theologically and in written form in 1892 in his book *Das Reich Gottes im Lichte der Gleichnisse*.[42]

I arrived at similar conclusions in two recent papers.[43]

Yet it is amazing that in the All Mennonite Conference in 1910 the Commission for Church Affairs (*Kommission für kirchliche Angelegenheiten*) witnessed Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Church leaders joining in their efforts to convince Petersburg that Mennonites were not a sect, but actually the unbroken apostolic succession of the original Christian church. "Thus, they were the only true church; they had left all others—even the Catholic Church. Such an interpretation was not well received by the orthodox."[44]

ICOMB Confession of Faith: Holding Inner Spirituality and Outer Transformation Together like Two Wings of a Dove

In an article entitled, "Spiritual gift of the MB church," Paul Schrag graciously states: "The Mennonite Brethren are the ones with the gift of letting the Spirit move them to release what they feel inside. MB's emphasize a faith that comes from the heart, and aren't afraid to talk about it."[45] They have been in danger of being "mostly Baptist" (Katie Funk Wiebe), but would love to identify themselves as "missionary believers." "The spiritual wing deals with the inner life, intimacy between God and our souls," writes Nzash Lumeya of Congo and P. Menno Joel of India in the confessional study, *Knowing and Living your Faith*, "The socio-cultural wing relates to social, cultural and environmental transformations."[46] That sounds like the best of both Anabaptism and evangelicalism. If both of these wings stay strong, Mennonite Brethren will continue to bless the Anabaptist movement, and the world, with a Spirit-filled witness.

Actually, the ICOMB Confession (written in 2004 by Lynn Jost, Takashi Manabe, Menno Joel, Arthur Dueck, Pascal Kulungo, Heinrich Klassen and Alfred Neufeld) sought an innovative global approach

to faith confession that is less dogmatic and more relational and covenant oriented. After summarizing God's saving history with humanity, the Mennonite Brethren churches commit themselves to a five-fold covenant relationship with God and with each other. They want to be a people of the Bible, people of a new way of life, people of the covenant community, people of reconciliation and people of hope.[47]

Delbert Wiens: Man, the Maker

One of the few Mennonite Brethren philosophers, Delbert Wiens, uses his analytical skill to assess Mennonite Brethren identity. He states that the Mennonite Brethren "ideal" is closely linked to

> the basic elements of modern western worldview [that] had begun to surface among Russian Mennonites...As (J. A.) Toews points out... "the Mennonites of South Russia went through a kind of *Kulturkampf* of their own" ...This rationalistic technological version of man-the-maker... The successful religious application of this new way of seeing apparently came later than the initial revelation of its economic meaning, perhaps because the religious leaders mostly remained bound by those more traditional patterns to which they owed their position."[48]

It is fascinating to read how Delbert Wiens applies the "man-the-maker" metaphor to the way Mennonite Brethren did secession theology and missions.

Surely Mennonite Brethren will benefit from Delbert Wiens' exhortations given thirty-five years ago:

> Our official ideal, and the metaphor upon which it is based, do not reflect the whole truth about us...A historian knows that what we have said about ourselves distorts the truth...A historian knows that the records of what we have said about ourselves hide much truth...For that matter, except for the kissing problem in the early years, and for missionaries, one would scarcely guess that there were sisters among the brothers ... ."[49]

Wiens, nevertheless, renders amazing homage to the "elders" by pointing to the danger of Mennonite Brethren inheriting a nice ideal that might end up as an "empty husk."

> Our elders spoke about their new ideals. They were right in doing so. But they did not forsake the older structures by which they had lived. The new had not done away with the old, and so the strengths of the old could nourish the new and keep it from becoming everything. But more and more we have tended to become the things we talked about. And so we lost the old that we either took for granted or were ashamed of. When we shall have succeeded in fully remaking ourselves in the image of our public pieties and our official truths, we shall have turned them into an empty husk, a shrill ideology, and an idolatry that damns us.[50]

Delbert Plett: Individualistic, Pietistic Arrogance of the "Converted" to Modernism

Steinbach-based lawyer Delbert Plett, with whom I had the joy of drinking coffee and discussing Mennonite Brethren heresy, displayed an almost apostolic zeal to convince theologians and historians that the Mennonite Brethren movement was a big tragedy for Mennonites. I considered him a friend and attended his funeral, but to the last week of his life he did not feel compelled to change his opinions.

Although Mennonite Brethren have not enjoyed Plett's rather harsh criticism, it has been healthy for Mennonite Brethren to realize that a completely different reading, over against the orthodox Mennonite Brethren interpretation, continues to be possible for some. Although Plett seems to be more of a preacher than a scholar, at least three of his issues deserve closer consideration. First, probably more than they intended, the Mennonite Brethren opened the door to the influence of modernity for Mennonites. Delbert Wiens with his "man-the-maker" interpretation, might deserve more consideration. Second, the Mennonite Brethren strategy toward Russian Mennonite Church piety might not have always been wise. Although the Mennonite Church that stayed in Russia soon joined the Mennonite Brethren in their quest for modernity, higher education, the Allianz movement, a rapid move toward German cultural Christianity

(*deutsches Kulturchristentum*), and the loss of non-resistance, the Mennonite Church people who left for Manitoba, and later for Mexico, kept a piety that produced a considerable clash when they encountered Mennonite Brethren evangelistic missionary zeal. Third, as even evangelist Johannes Reimer would admit, the Russian Mennonite Brethren understanding of conversion was very much marked by Edward Wuest's appeal to emotions (*Busskampf*), and a careful dating and punctual understanding of new birth.

Contextualization and the "Phenomenon of Renewal"

Even for church historians in the era of postmodernity, the "phenomenon of renewal" (J. B. Toews) is a rather ambiguous idea. Although renewal movements (*Erweckungen*), and deeper life services (*Vertiefungsversammlungen*) have been central concepts in Mennonite Brethren piety, most people have no clear idea what these words actually mean. I would suggest that using the current understanding of contextualization might be the best way to make the concept of renewal meaningful in the era of Skype, Twitter, Facebook, virtual libraries, BlackBerries and internet evangelism.

Paul Hiebert, the wonderful and magnificent Mennonite Brethren India missionary kid, in his foundational article, "Critical Contextualization," convincingly argues that Christians need to be immersed in the Bible if they want to stay relevant to their time.[51] I would dare to affirm, that what older Mennonite Brethren leaders called the renewal movement of 1860, could be called contextualization today. Paul Hiebert not only pointed toward the task of being meaningful to a particular culture and faithful to the Bible, but also argued that renewal (or contextualization or local theology) needs the global dialogue and the corrective (metatheology) of those parts of the body of Christ outside of one's own culture.[52]

Continuity and Contrast in the Mennonite Brethren Dissent of 1860

As far as I know, Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren have always considered themselves to be Mennonites who wanted to be authentic Anabaptists. My father told me again and again what the founding document of 1860 also states: "The Mennonite Brethren dissent wanted to restore the authenticity of the spiritual house of Menno

Simons!" Looking back at 150 years of church history it is evident that this goal has not always been achieved; it should, however, continue to be the Mennonite Brethren vision.

Menno Simons and the Mennonite Brethren had no real interest in founding a new denomination. They just wanted to be faithful to Jesus and to the legacy of the apostolic church. But power struggles, the cultural forces of religion, social unrest and ecumenical influences have played their part. There is no doubt that the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren dissent in 1860 had both *external* and *internal* factors that pushed toward dissent. Without Philipp Spener, A. H. Franke and Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, the *Pia Desideria* and the Moravian-pietistic movement, without Eduard Wuest, Jung Stilling and Gerhard Oncken, there would have been no Mennonite Brethren beginnings in 1860. And then there were internal reasons, which the dissenting brethren stated in their document of secession of January 6. In their view, these factors played the main role. They perceived a decadent, shallow and formalistic ethnic Mennonite community that lacked newness of life and spiritual vigor. They perceived an inherited believers church house of Menno Simons, fallen apart, was in urgent need of restoration to the original spirit of its founders and builders, and even more so, of the Spirit of Christ.

This was also the case with the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century: external factors such as the Italian Renaissance, the recovery of Aristotelian logic, the biblical humanism of Desiderius Erasmus, the radical discipleship lifestyle of the *Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens*, and the political emergence of *Eidgenossenschaft* in Switzerland, all played a decisive role among the radical Bible readers around Ulrich Zwingli by increasing their love for a symbolic interpretation of sacraments and for democratic structures within the believers church. With others in the Reformation they shared the general critique of the internal conditions within the established and hegemonious public church. But they also brought a severe critique against the reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther and John Calvin, for being so hesitant to implement the believers church concept and radical discipleship.

When the eighteen dissenting brethren left (or were asked to leave) the gathered local assembly of the official *kirchliche Mennoniten* (Mennonite Church) in Molotschna in 1860, they wanted both continuity and contrast. They vehemently argued that they were full Mennonites and unconditionally embraced the official and accepted Mennonite

Confession of Faith brought from the Netherlands and Prussia. But then they also stated with amazing clarity and courage that conditions in the official church must change, that especially personal redeeming faith by grace, church discipline and missions, so central to the Anabaptist heritage, must again be put into practice.

In a brief article, the late John A. Toews soberly reflects on why there are so many factions among Mennonites. After stating that "social, economic and cultural factors" are not enough for understanding the answer to the question, he continues:

> Different understandings of the Christian life have also occasioned numerous schisms. It is an accepted historical fact, that more schisms among Mennonites were the product of ethical issues than of issues of a doctrinal or theological nature. Luther's concern was principally with pure doctrine; Menno and his followers were principally concerned with pure living.[53]

Evidently, the 1860 dissent in the Molotschna colony was of the same character; not new doctrine or a new denomination, but the recovery of "pure living" and church discipline. According to J. H. Harms, the basic intention was continuity, but enriched with such elements as crisis conversion, public prayer and joy in the Lord (*Bekehrung, öffentliches Beten und grosse Freude im Herrn*). It is unfortunate that the Mennonite Brethren dissent was not understood that way by their opponents; they labeled them as fanatics (*Schwärmerei*).[54]

Is There Still a Need for the Special Mennonite Brethren Way and for Denominationalism Within the Global Mennonite Family?

Looking back at the community of scholars and the Mennonite Brethren Church "fathers" it is fair to summarize the essence of Mennonite Brethren dissent as follows: They wanted to recover the essential nature of the church, the existential dimension of salvation and the transcultural mission of the Holy Spirit. These three pillars of Christian identity are not unique: this is exactly what many Mennonite and non-Mennonite Christians also want. Mennonite Brethren should be careful not to fall into a cheap denominationalism, as has happened at times in the past, that is, to try to make a difference through some minor issues such as mode of baptism or emphasizing

the word "brethren," which now requires linguistic acrobatics to affirm that the word also includes "sisters." So it is reasonable to question whether there will be a specific denominational need for a Mennonite Brethren identity in the future. I would like to answer this question by exploring, (1) the socio-historical and church-cultural approach that builds identity, and (2) the specific Mennonite Brethren meaning of the nature of the church, the existential dimension of salvation and the transcultural mission of the Holy Spirit.

A Committed Church Identity Builds on History

Mennonite Brethren should not be preoccupied with the specific details of the Ukrainian-Molotschna church life where the Mennonite Brethren stepped out (or were asked to step out) of the established way to become a new Mennonite church in 1860. Almost all denominations were started by some minor historical incidents. There would be no 95 theses or Lutheran Reformation in 1517 without the hyper propagandistic preaching of Johannes Tetzel at the nearby Jüterbog on papal indulgences bought through money. There would be no Swiss Reformation in Zurich without Zwingli and friends enjoying a sausage barbeque during the days of Lent and fasting in 1523; no Baptist church without some minor differences between Dutch Mennonites and British Congregationalists in Amsterdam in 1610; and no split between registered and unregistered Baptist churches in the former Soviet Union without the specific registration policy in Moscow. The birth of the Mennonite Brethren was partly an accident of the Russian religious group settlement policy in the Ukraine.

The facts that create historical identities cannot be denied or undone. Because Mennonite Brethren theology, as well as Reformation theology more generally, does not believe that divine revelation continues through history and tradition, historic identity must never be overemphasized. As noted above, Mennonite Brethren affirmed in their first Confession of Faith (1902) that creedal and historic identities are not above, or even at the same level as, the Bible, but have to be *under* Scripture.[55]

So what can be learned from historic accidents? They have testimonial power by illustrating how people in the past, in very specific situations, tried to be faithful to Scripture. Mennonite Brethren interest in history, as well as their whole connection to Anabaptist theology cannot be more, but must not be less, than an identification with

the great "cloud of witnesses," who in their days tried to be faithful to Jesus. I am convinced that it is not good for the Mennonite Brethren to step away from their historic identity. History shows that leaving one denomination usually just ends up in the creation of a new denomination. An instructive case study in Paraguay is the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church (*Evangelisch Mennonitische Bruderschaft*), which wanted to bring together the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites, but ended up forming a third denomination within the Russian Anabaptist family.

A Committed Church Identity Builds on Theology

Using history to identify the essential theological contributions and priorities of the Mennonite Brethren 150 years ago will help emphasize these distinctives in the future. Recovering *the essential nature of the church* is a real challenge in the twenty-first century. I celebrate the newly recovered vigor for church planting and church growth in the ICOMB conferences. But I can still hear the words of René Padilla, when he asked Peter Wagner, a pioneer of the church growth movement, "My dear Peter, tell me, what is the church and what is growth?" For early Mennonite Brethren, to be part of the church had to do with a believers church concept, where each individual experienced new birth and the reception of the Holy Spirit. It had to do with a local congregation as a covenant community (*Bundesgemeinschaft*), with a national church as a covenant of local churches (*Bundeskonferenz*), with a local church as a disciplined community where beliefs and ethics reinforce each other. After the June Reform in 1865, the Mennonite Brethren adopted a congregational model of church governance far stronger than the historical Mennonite Church (*Kirchgemeinde*), which limited the power of the elders (*Ältesten*) to a simple leader (*Vorsteher*), and requested that church discipline have the consent of the gathered congregation. With this in mind, Mennonite Brethren today must meet the challenge of clarifying what it means to be the church in the upcoming decades.

Recovering *the existential dimension of salvation* is also an urgent task. It is crucial to being a missional church and for doing evangelism at home and abroad. Even the present (and necessary) debate about atonement theology will test the ability of Mennonite Brethren to contextualize and define the biblical/existential dimension of salvation. In the beginning, the individualized experience of salvation was

all important for Mennonite Brethren. The experience of salvation was again separated from a rather sacramentalized baptismal practice. It had to do with an existentially experienced change of heart, of mood, of personal authority and of ethics. In their Confession, the Mennonite Brethren insisted on the relationship between salvation, nonresistance, the ethics of love, and the relational identification with the heart and the mind of Jesus.

How then do Mennonite Brethren contextualize the salvation experience today? By holding on to these non-negotiable truths, salvation has to do with a real and an emotionally felt change; salvation has to do with the dynamic presence and indwelling of the Spirit of God; salvation has to do with a relational bondage to Jesus—his mind, his Spirit, his perspective, his way; salvation has to do with the inbreaking of a new time, a new eon, a new loyalty toward a new ruler, a new reality and new culture called the kingdom of God.

Recovering *the transcultural mission of the Holy Spirit* has very specific implications for Mennonite Brethren today. ICOMB is the new Mennonite Brethren face in mission so that they can be the missional church from all nations to all nations. Here they can experience the way mission transforms sending churches. Here Mennonite Brethren can demonstrate that mission is never a one-way street; it is always about both giving and receiving gifts of grace.

It is well known that having a house-church group conducting an independent communion service was not the only scandal caused by the early Mennonite Brethren in Molotschna. Elder Heinrich Huebert was imprisoned for a far more scandalous act: he was accused of baptizing a Russian maid. One is amazed at the willingness to suffer for missionary activity when reading through the diaries of Jacob Janzen and Abram Unger.[56] At stake was the special status of the Mennonites before the Russian authorities. Mennonite authorities pushed the early brethren to sign away the rights and privileges given to the larger Mennonite community. After being imprisoned for fourteen days at the Ostrog in Jekaterinoslaw, Abram Unger writes on July 20, 1862, about evangelizing members of the Russian sect known as *Molokaner* and a German circus-rider (*Kunstreiter*) as well as disputing about faith with some "cursing, highly learned, unbelievers." These are early glimpses of "holistic mission" while enduring the terrible injustices that people had to suffer in Russian prisons at that time. "With horror they watched the terrible procedure of the running of the gauntlet from their window. The fact that many were held in

investigative custody for years without a hearing caused Unger to cry out to God for justice."[57]

Preaching to Russians, and involvement in the emergence of the Russian Baptist Church, was part of the Mennonite Brethren legacy from the beginning. Their cross-cultural steps were one of the main causes of hostility and imprisonment in Mennonite and non-Mennonite institutions, as well as the crucial reason why some Mennonite leaders tried to remove the Mennonite identity of those involved in the new movement. World mission to India, China and the various ethnic groups in Russia was just a logical next step from these beginnings.

Mennonite Brethren Identity in the Global Orchestra of Denominations: A Theology of Denominationalism

It is clear that Edward Wuest did not want to start a new denomination. Neither did the dissenting brethren in 1860. In fact, as Johannes Reimer notes, all denominations were suspect for Wuest.[58] Such suspicion of denominations is typical for evangelists and revival preachers. They want to go beyond denominations (the entire world is their parish), but often, ironically, they end up giving birth to new denominations.

To be sure, many divisions and overlapping denominational labels are a pity and a pain for the unity of the church. But denominations are by no means "abominations." Quite the contrary—most of them have been necessary and legitimate contextualizations of the gospel, or rediscoveries of biblical truths that had been neglected. It is fair to say that in essence denominations are a blessing for the church. Like the diversity of species within creation, and the way the miracle of ecological balance reflects some of the wisdom and beauty of the Creator, so too denominations within the body of Christ are a gift and a complement to each other as long as they retain the basic metatheological core convictions. To make them disappear, to suppress them, or to declare them *persona non grata,* impoverishes the mission and witness of the church in the world.

In the orchestra of Anabaptist denominations the Mennonite Brethren Church is an important instrument. As Larry Miller, Secretary General of the Mennonite World Conference, recently demonstrated, the Mennonite Brethren are situated at the core of Anabaptist shared convictions. They are a little more evangelistic and conversionist

in their theology than some others, but according to Miller, they keep a healthy balance between extremes within the Anabaptist movement. Miller's enlightening analysis should challenge Mennonite Brethren to strengthen their identity by nurturing core Anabaptist values and convictions. Miller's analysis also shows that Mennonite Brethren are not growing the way they did in the past; their overall presence in the global Anabaptist family has decreased in the last two decades from 22% to 19%.[59] If this is correct, then it might be worthwhile for Mennonite Brethren to look after their spiritual heritage more carefully, to make it known, and to contextualize it for the wider Anabaptist family, for their national associations, as well as in the very challenging dialogues with the Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church. Within the next fifteen years Mennonite Brethren will remember 500 years of Protestant Reformation (2017) as well as 500 years of Anabaptist rebaptism (2025).

The Mennonite Brethren should bring their historic and theological perspectives not only to the global Mennonite family, but also to the wider Christian stage that includes the Faith and Order movement, the Global Christian Forum and the World Evangelical Alliance. Today it might be correct and biblical to affirm that diversity is beautiful, especially after so many interchurch expressions of forgiveness (from Lutherans, from Roman Catholics, between General Conference and Mennonite Brethren). This is not about cheap relativism about revealed truth, but rather about humility and even gratitude for the historic perspectives and special gifts every denomination is able to contribute to the wider body of Christ.

There might even be a need for more ecological balance between the varieties of denominational species. Nevertheless, all interchurch dialogue is fruitful if done from within strong identities. The loss of a denomination is a loss of history and impoverishes the beauty of the wide landscape of the church of Christ. Nevertheless, the frequent emergence of new denominations can be a challenge to the church unity.

An Apostolic and Prophetic Mennonite Brethren Future?

Jesus once warned his disciples and the Pharisees (Matt. 23:27-33) about the real danger of decorating the gravesites of the prophets, that is, overlooking the hypocrisy and lack of virtue inside. So what then is the best way for Mennonite Brethren to honor their 150-year history, their heroes of faith and their cloud of witnesses? It cannot be

anything less than building the church of Christ on apostolic and prophetic ground—he came preaching peace. "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit…built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:17-22).

An apostolic church is a church that overcomes the refugee complex by becoming a sent and sending church (*apostello* means sent from one place to another). The second generation Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, as well as the second generation of Mennonite Brethren, were tempted to become the "quiet in the land," to adapt to their environment in order to survive, hide or to have their peculiarities accepted as an exotic minority within Christendom. But the apostolic church created an opportunity to be sent into the world out of their persecution; they used it to be sent into new geographical regions, to be willing to make new "fatherlands."

The same model of "mission by migration" (John Howard Yoder) has been part of the Anabaptist and the Mennonite Brethren experience: new fatherlands in Danzig, Germantown, Molotschna, Omsk, Manitoba, Neuland, Buenos Aires have become "Mennonite territory." But when religious persecution stopped, their apostolic mission by migration became weak. The new frontiers might now be business and tourism. Mennonite Brethren business owners in Asunción know Shanghai and Cancun far better than the pastors do. To be an apostolic church requires Mennonite Brethren to redefine their church identity as a community of the kingdom of God, sent into the world in order to make the wonderful light of Jesus prevail over darkness. After all, the apostle Peter knew what it meant to be an apostolic church: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Mennonite Brethren must again become a prophetic church in the big Ninevehs and Babylonias of this world. It's not fun being sent to Nineveh—ask the prophet Jonah. And one might not even be able to pronounce God's wrath over ungodly Nineveh because there is a real chance that they might change. A prophetic church is "at peace and unafraid," as some remember the theology and challenge placed by John Howard Yoder.[60] There might well be some homework for Mennonite Brethren to do. From a radical social-ethics movement, inspired by genuine Christian spirituality in 1860, they have become a denomi-

nation that is not very interested in the prophetic call of the church. After all, it *was* Mennonite Brethren leaders who were worried about the Christian testimony of South Russian Mennonite communities over against the public eye of the Russian state (see the Document of Secession). Mennonite Brethren overcame racial and social discrimination between rich and poor in the Mennonite Ukrainian commonwealth, and between Russian maids and Prussian farmers who began meeting in shared worship and baptismal services. The Mennonite Brethren Confession (1902) dared to risk *Lehrunterschiede* (differences in theology) from the rest of the Mennonite Prussian tradition in order to recover true non-violence and Christian non-resistance. It was B. B. Janz who dared to promote *Holländerei* (theory of Dutch origins) in order to combat feelings of Mennonite Germanic racial superiority. And again it was B. B. Janz, along with some other Mennonite Brethren leaders, who profoundly rejected and resisted the debacle of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* (self defence). It was Mennonite Brethren pioneer Nikolai Siemens and his periodical, the *Mennoblatt*, who resisted Nazi fanaticism in the Fernheim colony and openly supported the Eberhard Arnold Bruderhof people who had been expelled by the German Gestapo. It was C. F. Klassen who coined the pragmatic word, *Gott kann* (God is able), when dealing with the huge refugee problem at high diplomatic levels in Geneva, London, Washington and Berlin. It was Mennonite Brethren missionaries who pioneered educational and health services in India, Congo and among the Lengua in the Chaco Boreal. It might be costly today to be a prophetic church. It will mean denouncing the false gods of nationalism, consumerism, capitalism, a shallow health and wealth gospel, evangelism without ecclesiology and without ethics, intellectualism and emotionalism.

A loyalty to the past only makes sense if there is a loyalty to the present and to the future. A Mennonite Brethren inclusive church, apostolic and prophetic, while recovering the existential meaning of conversion, the committed nature of the church, and the cross-cultural drive of God's missionary heart and Spirit, *can* and *shall* be a blessing for the coming generations.

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Historical
Reflections

For Each A Season: Telling the Mennonite Brethren Story

Valerie G. Rempel

In 1977, the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California, published a collection of essays entitled *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History*. The book celebrated the 1975 publication of J. A. Toews' *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, a work described as "the first officially authorized history of the Mennonite Brethren written in the English language."[1] In his introduction to the essays, editor Paul Toews pointed to the publication of J. A. Toews' book as one of several "indicators of renewed historical consciousness" occasioned by what he described as Mennonite Brethren "preoccupation in the 1970s with understanding their one hundred year old pilgrimage."[2]

During the summer of 2010, North Americans gathered to celebrate what is now a 150-year pilgrimage. Toews' *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* is long out of print and not even the most optimistic person would characterize this decade as "preoccupied" with understanding the 150-year-old Mennonite Brethren pilgrimage. Still, like all milestone anniversaries, the occasion of the sesquicentennial rightfully provides opportunity to (once again) revisit history and examine Mennonite Brethren identity. As someone who is now charged with teaching the story, I am especially interested in how that story has been told. What are the identified themes, the language used to describe the Mennonite Brethren, and how has that changed (if it has) over the years? To that end, this essay reviews four accounts of Mennonite Brethren history.

Anyone who has studied Mennonite Brethren beginnings is familiar with P. M. Friesen's monumental work, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*. First published in German in 1911, it began as one of the first "authorized" accounts of the movement that became the Mennonite Brethren Church. Friesen, a school teacher who had recently resigned his teaching position, was commissioned for the task

by the Rueckenau Mennonite Brethren Church in the Molotschna Colony of southern Russia. Friesen noted in his author's preface that his contact had "turned a portion of the historical material over to me, charged me to collect the necessary further material, to question the older brethren for information, and presented me with fifty rubles traveling money as well as a part of the payment intended for me."[3] The book was envisioned as a history of the first twenty-five years of the Mennonite Brethren Church, but Friesen found the work so consuming that in 1890 (already five years past the anniversary date) he offered, and the (Russian) Mennonite Brethren Conference accepted, "the collection of sifted, ordered, and elucidated material presented… as an adequate return for the money it had paid out."[4] Friesen continued the project on his own initiative, though it took another twenty years before a completed book was published. An English translation was eventually published in 1978, that decade referred to earlier as "preoccupied with historical pilgrimage."

Friesen had the challenging task of writing "fresh" history. As he put it, "It was still too difficult to be objective."[5] With a historian's eye, he sought to place the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren in the larger context of Mennonite history, and because the personalities and events surrounding the movement were still so vivid in people's memories—vivid, though not necessarily accurate—Friesen often included or freely adapted the documentary evidence that was still in existence as a way to set the record straight and avoid taking sides. Later generations have much cause to be grateful for this. Friesen's own optimism about the future of the church in Russia and the ongoing favor of the Tzars proved to be misplaced. In the turmoil of a new Bolshevik Russia much was destroyed, although in the more open climate of this decade surprising documents have been found in Russian archives.[6]

Historian Abraham Friesen has critiqued P. M. Friesen's work for not providing a "comprehensive, synthetic interpretation of the subjects," and it is a fair critique.[7] P. M. Friesen was walking a tightrope, trying to avoid offense, often discouraged by the character flaws of the people he was describing and shaped by his own view of the events and personalities. He seems preoccupied with his need to get the facts straight as he understands them, and because he adapts and edits documents, either to eliminate extraneous material or to protect the writer, readers are left with Friesen's editorial choices and little way of measuring the validity of those choices. Still, the work is a remarkable achievement in its breadth and detail. Its wandering from story

to sermon, diary entry to secession document or government report makes for a rich reading experience.

P. M. Friesen is unflinching in his description of the "Anabaptist illness," the proclivity towards "quarrels and dissensions" that has characterized the Mennonite experience from its beginnings in the ferment of the sixteenth century reformation.[8] Coupled with the practice of the ban, a critical marker of Anabaptist theology and practice, it has meant that Mennonite disagreements take on a particularly vindictive quality. Even today, it is difficult to read of the machinations of church and civic leaders who opposed those who disagreed with them, even to the point of financial ruin or physical violence, and not wonder about the quality of the much celebrated "community" ethos within Mennonite circles, the level of commitment to nonviolence and the ability to be authentically shaped by the New Testament story in which love of neighbor stands beside love for God. As a tradition that tends to read the radical Anabaptists as the "ones who got it right" in the sixteenth century, it is perhaps instructive to see the flaws in Mennonite Brethren practices and to wonder about the current expression of those traits. That said, Friesen is quick to excuse the Mennonite Brethren dissension and subsequent break from the Mennonite Church as "necessary" and even "salutary for all of the Russian Mennonites" "given the secularized state of the largest part of the Russian Mennonites and the inability and partial reluctance of the church councils generally to oppose the corruption."[9]

The corruption he referred to, expressed as a tolerance for sinful behavior on the part of church members and the secularization of church practices, especially as it related to baptism, came about, in part, because Mennonites in South Russia found themselves creating what their forebearers had argued against: a form of Christendom in which church and state worked together for the presumed good of the whole. As Friesen described it, the colony structure meant that "they now lived in closed civil communities and jurisdictional districts in which they not only could, *but were forced to* perform the considerable, though menial, police and judicial tasks of that time."[10] Disagreements over theological issues quickly morphed into what was characterized as civil disobedience so that when members of the Molotschna Mennonite Church attempted to form an independent Mennonite congregation (the so-called Mennonite "Brethren"), they were quickly reported to the area Administrative Office "with the request that you may do your part to dissuade them from embarking upon their errone-

ous intentions."[11] Measures were quickly put in place so that, as one opponent of the Mennonite Brethren Church put it, "they would be squeezed back into the church."[12]

The fight that ensued shapes the way P. M. Friesen wrote his book. Throughout the work he is intent to portray what became the Mennonite Brethren Church as not only "Mennonite to the core, in temperament,"[13] but also as a true child of Menno Simons. This is especially seen in his account of the dual theological impulses at play in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church—the pietism of the Lutheran revivalist preacher Eduard Wuest and the ongoing influence of Mennonite theology and practice. As he somewhat famously put it, "Menno built the house in which we live, on the one foundation" (referring to 1 Cor. 3:11), and Pastor Wuest brought "Vital air and warmth, food and drink...into the impoverished house."[14] In other words, Menno built the house and Wuest furnished it.

Of course, more than a concern for theological purity was at stake. The battle to define the Mennonite Brethren Church as genuinely Mennonite rather then newly formed Baptist (because of their quick adoption of baptism by immersion and their sometimes fellowship with German Baptists) was complicated by the politics governing the Mennonite colonies and their privileges. Early Mennonite Brethren leaders were at some pains to demonstrate that their separation from the larger church was not a separation from the Mennonite community at large lest their privileges—land, self-governance, release from military service, etc.—might be removed. Friesen follows that pattern, concluding "that the brethren remained 'Mennonites' appears to be more than amply documented."[15]

Although Friesen went to some lengths to establish the genuineness of their Mennonite theology and identity, it was also important for him to acknowledge the significant role that continental pietism played in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church, a role that he suggested somehow completed Mennonitism. In his view, "Evangelical Pietism in its wholesome essence has, like renewal, a harmonious effect on Mennonitism, just as Mennonitism is the critique and complement of Lutheranism. During their earliest period, both seemed to be mutually exclusive. In reality, together they form a whole when balanced in an apostolic arrangement."[16] In God's grace "he gave us Menno and Wuest, Spener and Tersteegen, Zinzendorf and Spurgeon, among many other greater or lesser characters of church history as teachers of righteousness."[17] Friesen thus portrays Mennonite

Brethren and other groups open to wider fellowship as modeling the better way.[18]

The importance of balance is a theme that is also evident in his account of the "free and exuberant movement" that took hold of the church during the first turbulent years of existence.[19] Advocates for a more spontaneous worship experience posited the shouts and joyful dancing that sometimes broke out as evidences of the Spirit's work and presence. Others saw it as an abuse of liberty that was bringing shame to the movement, especially when advocates of freedom became intolerant of those who advised moderation. Friesen sets the tone that later historians would follow by describing this period and the June reforms of 1865 as the "aberrations" of childhood and noting with satisfaction that order was restored in such a way that "could please both God and men."[20]

In short, Friesen presents us with an ideal, a new Mennonite church solidly grounded in Anabaptist theology but renewed through the warmth of German pietism.[21] One could add to this that they were helpfully organized by German Baptists.[22] Over the years, this dual identity has been alternatively embraced and decried depending on where the church stands on the benefits of either of these traditions or the balance between them in our theology and practice.

Although other works appeared in the period between Friesen's account of Mennonite Brethren beginnings and J. A. Toews' book, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, none had the breadth or sophistication that these two works have.[23] Toews' work came about at the instigation of the former General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel. According to A. J. Klassen's introduction to the book, it was born "in the crisis of the search for identity" during the mid-twentieth century. [24] Produced by the Board of Christian Literature, it was meant to serve as a textbook for college and Bible institute courses as well as a readable history for a general audience, including both the descendents of Russian Mennonites and those unfamiliar with "the cultural and ethnic background of European Mennonitism."[25] It was not a small task. Furthermore, the need for a textbook in English hints at larger issues of language transition, the growth of Mennonite Brethren educational institutions, and the perception that young people were in danger of falling away from the denomination.

Like P. M. Friesen, J. A. Toews continued the defense of the Mennonite Brethren secession from the larger Mennonite Church in Russia. He also continued to make the case that this should be

seen "not as a retreat from true Mennonitism, but as a return to it."[26] The need to return to a true Mennonitism not culturally defined, but theologically defined, is a subtle theme throughout the book. Toews is not above ending his chapters with sections such as "Lessons from History" or "General Observations," in which he calls for faithfulness to Christ or subtly warns against some form of cultural assimilation.[27] But unlike Friesen, Toews is far more aware of the problem of associating German language and culture with true religion. With a century of history and the vivid examples of the World Wars when defense of German nationalism became a problem in some Mennonite circles, as well as the difficult issues of language transition especially in the Canadian context,[28] Toews had good reason for his clearly stated critique of this tendency in Mennonite Brethren circles. As he observes early in his book: "The constant identification of true Mennonitism with German language and culture created serious problems for the faith and mission of the church."[29]

As a historian, Toews demonstrates familiarity with the wider arena of Mennonite scholarship in a way that helps him place Mennonite Brethren history in a wider Mennonite context. What he does less well is place that story in the larger story of American and Canadian religious history. Many of the program initiatives as well as theological impulses that moved in and out of Mennonite Brethren congregations during the twentieth century were shaped by movements in that larger religious arena. This is a minor complaint of his work, however, it tends to perpetuate what I think is often a tendency in Mennonite history, namely, to see Mennonite experiences as more unique then they perhaps are. For example, neither Toews nor Friesen before him, adequately situates the Mennonite Brethren renewal in the larger context of the nineteenth century evangelical movement that prompted waves of renewal and revival in North America, England and the Continent.[30]

Having said this, it is clear that Toews is working with a sense of Mennonite engagement with the larger evangelical world even if he does not always tease out these connections, and the reader is often left with a sense of his unease about some of these influences. For example, his chapter on Christian Education notes the movement away from a unified Mennonite curriculum and towards Scripture Press material. Toews carefully observes that "whether the growing indifference toward an Anabaptist-oriented Sunday school curriculum was the result of lack of promotional activity or whether it was due to

a new theological orientation cannot be ascertained from available records."[31] The reader, however, is left with the sense that Toews suspected the latter. Again, in his account of the "enthusiasms" of the early Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, that period marked by lively music, audible prayers and "unusual expressions of joy,"[32] and the subsequent "spiritual despotism"[33] of its strongest proponents, Toews makes a rather oblique connection to the charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s. After demonstrating the necessity and wisdom of the June Reforms of 1865 that effectively shut down the "liveliness" of early Mennonite Brethren worship services and reined in the abuses of certain leaders, Toews concludes the chapter by noting that "such lessons from history ought to be carefully heeded when movements similar to the *Froehliche Richtung* appear within church circles in the present day."[34]

Where Toews really shines is in his ability to pull together the story from the records of conventions and the minutes of meetings and to tell it in a comprehensive and readable fashion. This means, of course, that the book is primarily institutional history. As a result, women are notable by their absence—this is, indeed, the story of Mennonite "brethren." Even the important work of the Women's Missionary Service societies, both at the local and later at the district or provincial level, is absent from the story.[35] Likewise, the stories of other ethnic groups that were beginning to emerge within the North American story get only cursory treatment.

Toews also serves as something of a prophet. His history was written in the wake of the "constitutional crisis" of the mid-1950s that resulted in the creation of separate U.S. and Canadian national conferences.[36] While Toews interprets this as the "'growing pains' of a brotherhood that is expanding and maturing,"[37] his subsequent chapters dealing with leadership, theological identity and cultural influences already forewarn of the possibility of "denominational disintegration."[38] Less than three decades later, Mennonite Brethren would formally dissolve the General Conference.

Although the Toews book was meant, in part, for a general audience, its 500 pages are not light reading. Rather than update what is essentially a textbook, a new approach was taken in 2002 when Kindred Productions published a short introduction to Mennonite Brethren history and theology meant for a popular audience. *Family Matters: Discovering the Mennonite Brethren*, was written by Lynn Jost and Connie Faber who reworked an earlier book by Katie Funk Wiebe

titled, *Who are the Mennonite Brethren?* In their new book, Jost and Faber replaced "pilgrims and pioneers" with the language of "strangers and aliens" as the central metaphor of the Mennonite Brethren story.[39] They also used the contemporary and more gender inclusive language of family to describe the Mennonite "brotherhood." In doing so, they also reflect the changing nature of the Mennonite Brethren Church and the shift in emphasis from the blood ties of the original immigrant families, to the new reality of a diverse church membership which can, in its ideal, still function as "family."

In their account of Mennonite Brethren beginnings, Jost and Faber emphasize the desire for spiritual renewal and a stricter church discipline. They clearly identify the hallmarks of Mennonite Brethren theology: conversion as repentance and turning to God, baptism as a symbol of death to sin and resurrection to new life, discipleship as following after Jesus, the practice of communion and footwashing, and the call to an active sharing of the good news of Jesus.[40] People familiar with Anabaptist markers will recognize these as central to the tradition. In fact, what the book does best is translate Anabaptist ideas into everyday language that easily connects with a contemporary audience. For example, Mennonite Brethren are described as "people of the book," referring to the centrality of the Bible for all aspects of faith and life.[41] Mennonite Brethren theology of church and the importance of the community are developed in the context of the New Testament church, again, emphasizing the importance of scripture in Mennonite Brethren theology. Even the title offers a subtle play on the importance of community in its suggestion that family *matters*. These easily connect to a broader evangelical context that shares an emphasis on the authority of the Bible.

This is furthered by the way Jost and Faber note the influence of Lutheran Pietism and German Baptists in the early development of the Mennonite Brethren Church. The recognition of other theological strands does more than simply reflect historic origins, it also subtly suggests that newcomers to the church with roots in other traditions will find common ground. Jost and Faber clearly identify points of commonality with evangelical theology and point to cooperative work in evangelism and mission, as well as parachurch organizations.[42] They also connect a "historical emphasis on experiential faith" with charismatic influences that can be seen in music, discussions about spiritual warfare, etc.[43]

Jost and Faber are clearly continuing the balancing act that has been so characteristic of the Mennonite Brethren in their written accounts of the story. They do not shy away from making claims for a biblical foundation for the practice of nonresistance and love of neighbor, but they also admit that Mennonite Brethren are not unified on the issue. In a similar way, they offer a caution on church and state relationships and call for a "corporate oneness" that shares power and resists the idolatry of North American consumer culture.[44] They seem to be making the case for a strongly Anabaptist orientation in Mennonite Brethren theology and practice that is compatible with selected emphases of North American evangelicalism. *Family Matters* is a short, popular telling of the story that continues to be used by Mennonite Brethren in both the United States and Canada. In fact, portions have been adapted for both of the Conference websites.[45]

For sheer fun, however, it is difficult to match the 2002 publication of *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, a collection of essays, biographical sketches, stories and pictures edited by Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel. This "coffee-table style" book was produced to commemorate the "transition in the organized life of the Mennonite Brethren," meaning the "demise" of the General Conference.[46] It manages to combine concise, readable essays reflecting on Mennonite Brethren beginnings and institutions with the social history that explores everyday life. For example, John B. Toews writes the essay on origins in a way that follows the familiar contours of the story, but also describes the sense of personal and spiritual struggle that led to the experiences of conversion and renewal that were at the heart of the Mennonite Brethren experience in Russia. He describes the "house church spirituality" that brought ordinary people together to talk of their spiritual lives, to read scripture and pray together,[47] but also explores the issue of the territorial church that existed in Russia, and the questions that emerged given the intertwined relationships of church and civic leaders. Doreen Klassen traces the musical heritage of the tradition from its enthusiastic beginnings and borrowed hymnody to the development of unique hymnals and a strong choral tradition. Along the way, she highlights the "hymn that could not be left out" (*What Can Wash Away my Sin?*) and presents a picture of the handsome brass band that played at young people's meetings in the Ebenfeld (KS) church circa 1915.[48] John Redekop explores the influence of urbanization and traces political involvement and the economic success of Mennonite Brethren, while my essay

recalls Harvest Mission festivals, the traditional Christmas Eve program, the practice of mission sales and the important contributions of women's missionary societies. All of these essays are suggestive of the delicate dance between assimilation and boundary maintenance that Mennonite Brethren have struggled with during the past 150 years.

In spite of its deliberate attempt at a wide appeal, the book does not shy away from exploring the tensions within the Mennonite Brethren tradition between the various theological strands that have shaped the denominations—what Lynn Jost refers to as the "three-legged stool of Pietism, evangelicalism and Anabaptism" that run together in Mennonite Brethren theology.[49] His essay points to the influences of dispensationalism and American fundamentalism in a way that helps situate the story of North American Mennonite Brethren in a larger religious context and demonstrates the way Mennonite Brethren continued to be shaped by outside theological influences. He contrasts that with the reshaping of Mennonite Brethren identity in the years after World War II, noting how the shared experience of Civilian Public Service brought together Mennonites of all stripes and helped renew a conscious sense of Anabaptist theology and heritage among young Mennonite Brethren. This coincided with a renewed emphasis on Anabaptist identity in several key Mennonite Brethren educational institutions and led to a more conscious reclaiming of historic Mennonite Brethren ideals.

For Everything a Season enlarges the story, but it is still primarily a story of white Mennonite Brethren. Wally Unger's essay is the exception as it traces in words and pictures the city mission work, efforts to evangelize among the indigenous people of North America, and the growth of new ethnic groups within the Mennonite Brethren family. This is an important step forward because it begins to lodge non-Europeans in the story. That effort is most fully realized with the release this summer of *Mennonite Brethren around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, the new global history of the Mennonite Brethren Church edited by Abe Dueck. For one hundred years the descendents of the Russian Mennonites have told the Mennonite Brethren story. It seems quite likely that North Americans will learn something new about that Mennonite Brethren story when it is seen through the eyes of the global church.

History is always written in a context and each of these books reflects the needs and concerns of its era. P. M. Friesen sought to collect and order the stories and documents of the early period as a way of

preserving a particular interpretation of Mennonite Brethren beginnings. J. A. Toews, writing in the 1970s, wrote a textbook at a time when Mennonite Brethren identity seemed threatened by assimilation into North American culture. He made a case for the importance of an Anabaptist heritage that seemed in danger of being lost. At the turn of the century, Lynn Jost and Connie Faber made that case even more strongly. Their book was a deliberate attempt to introduce and make the case for Anabaptist theology in its distinctly Mennonite Brethren form to a diverse membership whose formative church experiences increasingly reflect the diversity of North American evangelicalism. Shortly thereafter, Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel produced a collection of essays celebrating the theological and social history of a denomination that was dismantling historic relationships and institutions. Each in its own way attempted to reflect and shape Mennonite Brethren identity, often intentionally advocating for a clear grounding in the Anabaptist theological tradition while acknowledging and even celebrating the reality of evangelical influence and leanings. To borrow the language of Toews and Enns-Rempel, they were each produced for a season.

Endnotes

1 Paul Toews, ed., *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History.* Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought, No. 1 (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1977), 9.

2 Toews, *Pilgrims and* Strangers, 8.

3 Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, rev. ed., trans. J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Harry Loewen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), xxvii.

4 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia,* xxviii.

5 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia,* xxviii.

6 See especially Ingrid I. Epp and Harvey L. Dyck, *The Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive, 1803-1920: A Research Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). This represents material taken in 1929 and rediscovered in the early 1990s in the Odessa Regional State Archives. Other material related to the Mennonite experience in Russia from 1920 and forward has been found in the State Archive of the Russian Federation and elsewhere. See Peter Letkemann, "The Files of the Allrussischer Mennonitische Landwirtschaftlicher Verein (AMLV)," *The Mennonite Historian*, 32, no. 3 (September 2006): 4-5. See also A. I. Savin, *Ethno-Confession in the Soviet State: Mennonites in Siberia,*

1920-1989: Annotated List of Archival Documents, trans. Olga Shmakina with assistance from Lyudmilla Kariaka; ed., Paul Toews (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences, Siberian Branch, 2008).

7 Abraham Friesen, "P. M. Friesen the Historian," in *P. M. Friesen and His History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings*, ed., Abraham Friesen (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), 84.

8 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia,* 31. See also page 108, referencing the disagreement about the "Brotherhood School." Friesen writes, "The evil, apparently incurable 'Anabaptist illness,' the passion to divide, drove them apart and diminished each individual's strength considerably."

9 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 202.

10 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 92 (emphasis mine). Friesen's choice to portray Mennonite self-governance as somehow forced on the population seems disingenuous given the freedom this privilege provided to the colonies.

11 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia,* 233.

12 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 247. These measures included denial of passes that would enable Mennonite Brethren to travel or even to move to new areas where they could form independent congregations, and the invalidation of marriages performed in Mennonite Brethren congregations.

13 See Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 443. Friesen describes the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America as "more like the *Kleine Gemeinde* (more puritanical in attitude, somewhat melancholic and formalistically-ascetically pious) rather than like the 'Huepfer.'"

14 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 211-212.

15 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 232. This also has implications, I think, for an ongoing ethnic and cultural understanding of what it means to be Mennonite. In their early evangelistic work among their neighbors, Mennonite Brethren ended up helping to form Baptist congregations because it was legally difficult to add members from outside the traditional Mennonite community. See, for example, the story of the Don River Area, 511-513.

16 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 212.

17 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 225.

18 Friesen identifies himself as sympathetic to the Alliance movement that allowed for greater freedom in fellowship with other believers.

19 See Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, "XVIII, The 'Free and Exuberant Movement' in the organized M.B. Church and its Final Conquest," 262-279.

20 See Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 275-277.

21 It is clear from Friesen's accounts that Mennonite Brethren were reading a range of evangelical material such as Spurgeon's sermons, pietistic devotional literature, Baptist theology, etc.

22 See Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, XX, for the account of how early Baptists helped form the General Conference and shape its early confession of faith.

23 See A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde, 1860-1954* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1955); and John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Breth-*

ren Church (Hillsboro: The Board of Foreign Missions, the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950).

24 A. J. Klassen, "Introduction," in J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers,* ed., A. J. Klassen (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), vii.

25 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* xi.

26 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 4.

27 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 66, 338.

28 See especially Gerald C. Ediger, *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren, 1940-1970,* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001).

29 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 14.

30 The revival that occurred among Mennonite Brethren as well as the missionary impulse that came to characterize MBs appears to have much in common with other nineteenth century evangelicals. Even the description of the "enthusiasms" seems remarkably similar to descriptions of exuberance during the second Great Awakening or other renewal movements of the nineteenth century.

31 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 221.

32 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 58. Toews is quoting a report made by Benjamin Becker who went to observe a worship service.

33 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 61.

34 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 68.

35 See, for example, Gloria Neufeld Redekop, "Canadian Mennonite Women's Societies: More than Meets the Eye," and Valerie Rempel, "She Hath Done What She Could: The Development of the Women's Missionary Service in the Mennonite Brethren Churches of the United States," in *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Twenthieth Century, Essays and Autobiographies,* ed., Paul Toews (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1995). See also Katie Funk Wiebe, ed., *Women among the Brethren: Stories of 15 Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Women* (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1979).

36 See Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,*, chap. 13, "Organization for United Action," 194ff.

37 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 213.

38 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 312.

39 Lynn Jost and Connie Faber, *Family Matters: Discovering the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), x.

40 Jost and Faber, *Family Matters,* 15.

41 Jost and Faber, *Family Matters,* 25ff.

42 Jost and Faber, *Family Matters,* 28.

43 Jost and Faber, *Family Matters,* 28.

44 Jost and Faber, *Family Matters,* 52.

45 See http://www.usmb.org/our-story; and http://www.mbconf.ca/home/about_us/our_story/, accessed July 9, 2010.

46 Paul B. Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel, eds., *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, An Informal History* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 1.

47 John B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Beginnings," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, An Informal History*, eds., Paul B. Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 11.

48 Doreen Klassen, "To Improve Congregational Singing: Music in the Church," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, An Informal History*, eds., Paul B. Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 128, 131.

49 Lynn Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, An Informal History*, eds., Paul B. Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 53.

Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Evangelical Anabaptist Identity

Bruce L. Guenther

Introduction

The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches website currently describes the denomination as a community of congregations spread across Canada, "united by Jesus Christ through our *evangelical Anabaptist* beliefs and values."[1] Despite its widespread public usage today, Mennonite Brethren leaders have only utilized this "double-barrel" label to denote their sense of theological and denominational identity since the 1980s.[2] This chapter examines the historical foundation for the appropriation of the dual evangelical Anabaptist identity, and explores the complicated and controversial relationship within the Mennonite Brethren Church concerning the influence of the two traditions identified in this dual label.[3] Both parts of the label have numerous connotations (not all positive), which is not surprising given that the historical traditions they name were, and still are, diverse and dynamic. Discussions about the influence of these two traditions among Mennonite Brethren have often been divisive as people expressed preference for one over the other, often by highlighting the best in one tradition, and the worst in the other, and sometimes by seeing the two traditions as antithetical to each other.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first section focuses on Mennonite Brethren as Anabaptists, and the second on Mennonite Brethren as evangelical Protestants. Each part offers an approximately chronological survey of the influence that these traditions have had within the Mennonite Brethren Church. Particular attention is given to historiographical issues that surround the movement's origins and that have shaped the way the influence of these traditions has been understood. I argue that the dual label is an appropriate description of the theological and pragmatic eclecticism that has characterized

the Mennonite Brethren Church since its origins in 1860 in Russia to the present. Throughout its history the Mennonite Brethren Church has selectively adopted aspects of its Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage as well as incorporated emphases and practices from other Christian traditions with which it came into contact, particularly evangelical Protestantism in North America.

This eclectic "multiple inheritance" has been a source of conflict at times; it has contributed significantly to a longstanding ambiguity about Mennonite Brethren theological identity, and has resulted in a greater degree of theological diversity than has generally been present in other Mennonite denominations.[4] After 150 years of living with the dynamic tension created by such eclecticism, and the ambiguity concerning Mennonite Brethren theological identity, it is time to recognize this dual identity as a valuable legacy and an important foundation for charting the denomination's future.

Mennonite Brethren as Anabaptists

Anabaptist Identity in Russia

Despite occasional claims to the contrary, the Mennonite Brethren do have a legitimate claim to being heirs of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist tradition even if the motivation for making such claims are at times mixed, and even though they brought a new set of priorities to the emphases to which they laid claim within the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition.

From the outset the Mennonite Brethren Church explicitly identified itself as a part of the Mennonite stream within the larger, diverse Anabaptist tradition. This identification appears in the hastily issued declaration of secession issued in the village of Elisabethtal (Molotschna Colony) on January 6, 1860, which repeatedly appealed to "our dear Menno,"[5] and again in letter of explanation sent to the Ohrloff church council on March 19, 1860.[6] A year later on January 1, 1861, the group designated as its own the "Confession of the United Flemish, Frisian and High German Anabaptist-Mennonite Church, published by the Rudnerweide Church in South Russia, 1853" (called the Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Confession).[7] This Confession is organically related to a series of major Mennonite confessions including the mother of all Mennonite confessions, the Dordrecht Confession (1632).[8]

Despite intentional attempts on the part of the new movement to signal their continuity with their Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage, the conflict generated by the schism caught the attention of the Russian authorities. Leaders of the new movement were aware that establishing the case for continuity was necessary for the preservation of their legal status. The claim to be in continuity with the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition was therefore not only made through early confessions, but also in their interaction with Russian authorities. On December 27, 1860, in a letter addressed to the Supervisory Commission, Mennonite Brethren leaders claimed:

> we are not a newly-established sect, as the worthy Supervisory Commission likes to call us. On the contrary, we are the seed of the imperishable Word of God, which was preached to us by the Apostles, explained through the Holy Spirit, and have become a fruit of the living faith of our beloved founder Menno Simons . . . hence we rightly call ourselves the genuine descendants of true Mennonitism.[9]

In Einlage (Chortiza Colony) during the early 1860s, leaders of the new movement were severely pressured to stop their gatherings. Their refusal resulted in beatings and imprisonment and demands to surrender their rights as Mennonites, which would have enabled Mennonite leaders to banish them. In 1862 Heinrich Neufeld resolutely refused both to stop teaching and to recant his Mennonite identity:

> I, Mennonite Heinrich Neufeld, have in no way renounced my adherence to my Mennonite faith. Instead I confess that the reformer Menno Simons, introduced baptism and holy communion according to God's Word. In the course of years it has degenerated so that today it is no longer carried out according to the Scripture. Because a group of us Mennonites have come to this insight through the Holy Spirit, we are endeavoring to act according to God's Word again... .[10]

Nevertheless, the antagonism between the larger Mennonite Church (*Kirchengemeinde*) in Russia and the recently formed Mennonite Brethren Church, and the disregard for established authority, mani-

fested by some early Mennonite Brethren, generated scepticism about the claims of continuity.[11]

In 1866 August Liebig, a German Baptist leader, came to visit the Einlage congregation. This marked the beginning of a close fraternal relationship and led to the borrowing of a variety of practices from the German Baptists (e.g., Sunday schools). This relationship complicated further the question surrounding the true denominational identity of the Einlage leaders, and precipitated a visit in 1873 from a Russian government official inquiring about their relationship to the Baptists. In order to differentiate themselves from the Baptist movement, Einlage leaders submitted in 1876 a revised version of the German Baptist Hamburg Confession that they had adapted to Mennonite teaching. Official clarity concerning the status of the new movement eventually came from the Department of the Interior in 1880, confirming the status and rights of the Mennonite Brethren as "Mennonites."[12]

Over time the hostility and ill-will that characterized relations between the Mennonite Church in Russia and the Mennonite Brethren Church during the 1860s gradually diminished. Despite some ongoing irritants between the two Mennonite groups, the growing challenge of dealing with Russification policies, which threatened to diminish the privileges to which the Mennonites were accustomed, prompted them to work together in arranging a forestry service program as an alternative to compulsory military service for their young men. Anti-German hostilities generated by World War I, and the political chaos created by the Bolshevik Revolution precipitated a new level of urgency for working together and culminated in a series of All-Mennonite Conferences in 1917 and 1918. The common bond of suffering during this terrifying and chaotic time, along with the common experience of migration, reinforced the collective identity of the Mennonites who managed to escape from Russia.

The Anabaptist identity of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and North America was reiterated yet again in the first Confession of Faith officially prepared by the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1902. The motivation for this initiative came in part from a long-standing discomfort around the confessional document created by the Einlage congregation. According to Abram Klassen, the "concern was not so much the doctrines expressed as the manner of describing denominational differences."[13] A study commission appointed in 1898 brought forward recommendations, which culminated in a new Confession. It is a thorough and carefully crafted statement, which follows the

basic structure of the Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Confession. The 1902 Confession, which was translated into English in 1916, contains multiple excerpts from the writings of Menno Simons and references several other Anabaptist documents as important sources. Evidence of theological consistency with the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition abounds: the church is seen as a called-out community of people who manifest the fruits of conversion, live holy lives, preach the pure gospel, pray and live in unity showing love to each other and neighbor. Followers of Christ are instructed not to swear oaths or seek revenge on their enemies. The Confession engages several Calvinist emphases such as predestination more directly than the previous Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Confession, and maintains an Arminian tilt in its discussion of justification and sanctification. Despite their differences with other Mennonites in Russia, the "Introduction" to the 1902 Confession explicitly stated that the "new organization did not dissolve the confessional fellowship with the Mennonite Anabaptist churches in Russia."[14] Put differently, the Mennonite Brethren "protest" in 1860 was in their view not primarily about theology, but about ecclesiastical practice and personal ethics, especially regarding baptism and church discipline.

Anabaptist Identity in North America

During the 1880s several Mennonite Brethren itinerant evangelists from the United States started services among the Mennonites who had settled in southern Manitoba. These evangelistic initiatives by the Mennonite Brethren rekindled old hostilities with other Mennonite churches in Canada. In 1888 the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada came into being near Winkler, Manitoba. Mennonite immigration from the United States gradually augmented the number of Mennonite Brethren congregations, particularly in Saskatchewan. By the early 1920s there were only about twenty Mennonite Brethren congregations in Canada with a total membership of approximately 2,000. This number more than doubled in the next two decades as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent wars, famine and persecution. A new wave of more than 20,000 Mennonite immigrants—about 20-25% were Mennonite Brethren—came to Canada who were desperately seeking refuge from the chaos and carnage in Europe. The German-speaking immigrants who were part of Mennonite Brethren congregations in Canada during the first half of

the twentieth century were preoccupied with economic survival and adjusting to life in a new land. Following a common pattern among religious immigrants, considerable energy was given to establishing vibrant congregational communities to maintain as much stability and familiarity as possible in the life of the group; this left little time for sustained reflection about their own theological identity alongside the other denominations in Canada.

The Mennonite immigrants from Russia brought with them a unique faith-embedded culture. Their preference for the German language, along with specific foods and customs, were part of a cultural composite derived over the centuries from their time in Russia, Prussia and Holland, and reinforced by living in geographically confined enclaves. Over time "Mennonite" identity was connected not only to a set of Mennonite-Anabaptist theological affirmations spelled out in confessions and catechisms, but also to a particular ethnic and cultural synthesis. For a time this ethnic and cultural synthesis helped to insulate Mennonite Brethren in Canada from the fundamentalist and evangelical influences that was felt more strongly in the United States during the early twentieth century. The careless fusion of what became known in Canada as a "Mennonite" ethnicity and Mennonite-Anabaptist theological identity prompted many second and third generation Mennonite Brethren to look towards more outwardly focused expressions of Christian faith that were not connected to one particular ethnicity. This fusion plagued the Mennonite Brethren in Canada throughout much of the twentieth century; it discouraged many individuals with other ethnic identities from joining Mennonite Brethren congregations and created considerable confusion about the nature of an Anabaptist theological identity.[15]

To their credit, the early Mennonite Brethren immigrants devoted considerable energy to nurturing their young people in the faith. This included efforts to prolong the use of the German language despite the pressure to learn and use English in their new country. German Saturday schools were organized to augment the education of children. The Mennonite Brethren were among the first to start Bible schools in western Canada, beginning as early as 1913, and organized more schools than any other denomination in Canada—over twenty with most starting during the 1930s and 1940s. These schools were started for young people, in order to, in the words of a Bethany Bible School calendar issued in 1937,

> give our...youth foundational Bible instruction...to wrench our youth away from frivolous pursuits and the contemporary "*Zeitgeist*" ...to nurture the German language as a special possession handed down from our fathers...to raise believing youth for the battle of the faith... [and] to take into account the needs of the congregations in the methodical training of Sunday school teachers and sundry (church) workers.

The Bible schools were intended to serve as agents of cultural retention by grounding successive generations in the German language and the Mennonite-Anabaptist faith and way of life. Increasingly school leaders were pressured to use English language materials. The absence of suitable Mennonite-Anabaptist resources resulted in a diminished understanding of Mennonite-Anabaptist history and theology. The Bible schools became crucibles in which the children and grandchildren of first-generation immigrants redesigned the relationship between faith and culture by drawing upon several features of Mennonite Brethren DNA: the high regard for education, the commitment to the missionary mandate and the movement's eclecticism.[16]

Renewal of Interest in Anabaptist Identity

Interest in recovering a stronger sense of Mennonite-Anabaptist theological identity became more pronounced for a time during the 1940s. World War II forced Mennonite Brethren once again to face the issue of military service and served as an occasion to emphasize their Anabaptist roots. Mennonite Brethren leaders were at the forefront of negotiating an alternative service program in which many Mennonite Brethren men served during the war.

A much more concerted effort to recover an Anabaptist identity began during the 1960s. Driven by a concern about the growing impact of acculturation, and the close association with evangelical Protestantism, Mennonite Brethren leaders sought a new way to articulate and strengthen Mennonite Brethren identity. They found inspiration in the widely distributed presidential address given by Harold Bender to the American Society of Church History entitled, "The Anabaptist Vision." The address succinctly outlined three emphases that he considered to be characteristic of "original evangelical and constructive Anabaptism": discipleship, the church as a voluntary

and separated brotherhood and love and nonresistance in all relationships.[17] The influence of this address was so widespread that, in the words of historian Paul Toews, it became the "identifying incantation for North American Mennonites."[18]

Underlying Bender's historical interpretation of Anabaptism was the assumption that Anabaptism had started in its purest form in 1525 in Switzerland, spread to other parts of Europe where, in some instances at least, minor offshoots deviated from the original expression. The Swiss Brethren served as the source and standard for authentic nonresistant Anabaptism. Bender's work did much to rescue the scholarly study of sixteenth-century Anabaptism from obscurity and historiographical prejudice. Moreover, it helped establish the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition as a progressive movement that espoused the separation of church and state, freedom of religion and a communal ecclesiology. Bender's Anabaptist Vision gave North American Mennonites a credible past on which to build a proud heritage; it simultaneously served as a kind of theological plumb line for determining what could legitimately be called Anabaptist and Mennonite.[19] Further, it provided a way for differentiating Mennonites more clearly from evangelical Protestants with whom they had much in common.

The Mennonite Brethren were more captivated by Bender's Anabaptist vision than other Mennonites in Canada. This interest was promoted through their denominational publications and educational institutions.[20] Key publications for promoting a greater sense of denominational identity and unity included the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, started in 1962, and an English-language graded Sunday school curriculum. Two institutions in particular helped the Mennonite Brethren in Canada re-emphasize the importance of the Anabaptist tradition: Mennonite Brethren Biblical College and Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

Increasingly prominent in shaping denominational identity from the mid-1940s until the 1970s was Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) in Winnipeg, which soon superceded the smaller Bible schools as a major center of influence. The school was the first advanced theological school established by Mennonites in Canada, and "marked a clear assertion of a Canadian MB identity distinct from the US MBs."[21] Led at the outset by A. H. Unruh, the school featured some of the denomination's brightest scholars as faculty (e.g., John A. Toews, David Ewert, Frank C. Peters), many of whom had been influenced by Bender's Anabaptist vision (particularly those

who had spent time at Tabor College) and who sought to assert a more distinctly Anabaptist identity in contrast to the more evangelical orientation of many Mennonite Brethren Bible schools at the time. Typical of many students was Katie Funk Wiebe who recalls that the word "Anabaptism" was foreign to her vocabulary until her studies at MBBC.[22]

In 1975 the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference became a partner in the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (MBBS) located in Fresno, California. Founded in 1955, the seminary was known for its missionary vision and openness to American fundamentalist emphases particularly dispensational premillennialism. Under the leadership of J. B. Toews and Abe J. Klassen, the school reoriented its theological stance during the 1960s and the faculty became more intentional about emphasizing Anabaptist perspectives. J. B. Toews argued that a Mennonite Brethren seminary was necessary because "main stream evangelical Protestant" programs had not been able to prepare Mennonite Brethren leaders with an "Anabaptist theological orientation which insists on a consistent relationship between faith and life plus experiential spiritual realities expressed in the immediate and wider contexts."[23] Guiding the school into its second decade of existence was a newly revised "Statement of Purpose and Philosophy" that affirmed both an "evangelical commitment" to the Scriptures as inspired and authoritative, and to an "Anabaptist view of the church."[24] Despite the proposed balance, the accent from MBBS faculty has often been heavier on Anabaptist than on evangelical, in part because it served as a way for differentiating the Mennonite Brethren from other evangelical denominational (and transdenominational) institutions in the United States.[25]

Seminary faculty frequently played key leadership roles in the General Conference Board of Christian Literature, which was established in 1965, and the Historical Commission, established in 1969. The events organized and the publications produced by these two bodies also contributed to reawakening a sense of Anabaptist identity during the latter half of the twentieth century. As early as 1951 the Board of Reference and Counsel suggested that it was time for a new denominational history, one which might address the fracturing theological and cultural identity of the conference.[26] A volume was published by A. H. Unruh in 1954, but the fact that it was written in German, and that the denomination was making the transition to the English language, meant that the book had a limited shelf-life.[27]

Several important denominational history books were published during the 1970s,[28] including a comprehensive volume by John A. Toews, a man with an uncompromising commitment to promoting an Anabaptist vision that was deeply shaped by Bender and that was seen as a necessary antidote for the influence of American evangelicalism.[29] Toews' volume came at a crucial time in the Mennonite Brethren search for a new historical and theological identity. He notes the influence of Lutheran pietists, German Baptists and evangelical Protestantism within the Mennonite Brethren story, but considered these to be "external" forces that reinforced a tendency towards indiscriminate "exposure to every wind of doctrine from various theological schools of thought."[30] In an attempt to stabilize the precarious state of denominational identity he argued that the group is best understood as the true "spiritual heirs of the early Anabaptists": his narrative deliberately and unambiguously identifies the Mennonite Brethren...with the historic theological position of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement...the early Brethren regarded their withdrawal from the existing Mennonite churches not as a retreat from true Mennonitism, but as a return to it."[31] "By linking the Mennonite Brethren story more closely to the cultural nonconforming themes of Anabaptism," Paul Toews notes that John A. Toews' denominational narrative

> nourished the historic continuity of a denomination increasingly tempted with cultural assimilation; by reaffirming the ethical imperatives of Anabaptism, they renewed interest in service and benevolence in a denomination increasingly tempted to accept the adequacy of verbal witness; and by their more ecumenical perspectives on history, they nurtured a growing participation in associational networks that link together Mennonite peoples.[32]

The emphasis on an Anabaptist identity was an attempt to address a growing historical amnesia, and the polarization between those who wanted a closer alignment with the National Association of Evangelicals, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Campus Crusade for Christ, and those whose allegiances ran more towards inter-Mennonite alliances.

Given the mid-twentieth century interest in denominational identity, it is perhaps not coincidental that a major revision of the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith also occurred during the early 1970s.

The Preface clearly indicates a desire for continuity not only with the 1902 Confession, but also with the broader "evangelical Mennonite-Anabaptism of the sixteenth-century Reformation."[33] Although the Confession reflects the influence of evangelical Protestant theological concerns, and some of the issues specific to a North American context (e.g., Revelation, Christian Ministries, Marriage and the Christian Home, Lord's Day and Work), the progression of articles is still similar to that of other Mennonite confessions.[34]

The cumulative impact of Mennonite Brethren institutions and publications in promoting an Anabaptist vision can be glimpsed in the results of the church membership profiles gathered by J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder in 1972, which ranked the Mennonite Brethren in Canada significantly higher on the Anabaptist scale (based upon Bender's Anabaptist vision) than Mennonite Brethren in the United States. Approximately 40% of the Mennonite Brethren members surveyed in North America ranked high on the author's Anabaptist scale, with another 33% ranked in the middle of the scale.[35] A recent survey indicates that almost 50% of Mennonite Brethren in North America continue to identify their theological perspective as Anabaptist, but only 16% of pastors identify themselves as primarily Anabaptist and less than 10% of *Mennonite Brethren Herald* readers identify themselves as primarily Anabaptist.[36] Both surveys showed that the number of Mennonite Brethren who identified themselves as primarily evangelical is double that of those who identified themselves as primarily Anabaptist. Approximately 50% of Mennonite Brethren were comfortable identifying themselves as evangelical Anabaptist.

It is clear that the reasons for claiming an Anabaptist identity have varied over time: in Russia, early Mennonite Brethren leaders were quick to claim continuity with the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition, at least in part, to ensure that they did not jeopardize their legal status as Mennonites. In North America, the appropriation of an Anabaptist identity was utilized by some to differentiate their unique theological ethos within a smorgasbord of Protestant options. This raises the question of what does, or what should, it mean for Mennonite Brethren to claim to be Anabaptist today? Any claim to be Anabaptist needs to be made with care: as Walter Klaassen once remarked, "The Anabaptism that we know is the construction of historians and theologians."[37] Late twentieth-century scholarship has shown that the origins, ideas and experiences of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement were much more complex and diverse than Bender and other Mennonite propo-

nents of the Anabaptist vision acknowledged. The so-called "polygenesis" historiography signaled a scholarly *coup d'etat* that marked the end of Bender's virtual historiographical monopoly in the interpretation of Anabaptism, and raised important questions about the way Mennonites appropriated the Anabaptist label.[38]

Greater awareness of the theological diversity among Anabaptists has drawn attention to the "confessional partisanship" by which Mennonite historians sometimes isolated and selectively endorsed only those aspects of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement that they considered to be normative for Mennonites today, and ignored information that challenged their intended version of events. Thomas Finger succinctly states: "Historic Anabaptism espoused many unpalatable views...to simply claim Anabaptism for one's position is to obscure one's real reasons for accepting some views but not others."[39]

Although the polygenesis historiography has generated considerable discussion among historians and Mennonite theologians, its impact has generally not been felt among the majority of Mennonite church leaders and laity. The twentieth century has only increased the connotations that the Anabaptist label carries, and simplistic usages of the term abounds. Explanations for such a lack of awareness and influence vary: Arnold Synder suggests that the new historiography

> has been dealt with, in the North American Mennonite Church at least, more by a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its existence than by an effort to reflect upon, incorporate, and assimilate its disturbing findings. Most Mennonite pastors, and the vast majority of Mennonite church members, appear not to be aware of the fact that their Anabaptist parents in the faith disagreed profoundly amongst themselves on crucial theological issues. Instinctively, it seems, we prefer to imagine a pure past which had all the answers which we then try to emulate as best we can in our time and place.
>
> Of course, church history can be used much more easily when the past is idealized, and pure historical examples from a golden age can be held up in the present as models to be emulated. A Mennonite minister preaching a sermon on Peace Sunday, for example, would simply muddy the waters by attempting to explain to the congregation that, as a matter of fact, Anabaptists differed

> amongst themselves on matters of the sword. Perhaps the mythical image of an Anabaptist consensus concerning non-resistance, for example, has survived the onslaught of polygenesis historiography in Mennonite churches partly because Anabaptist non-resistance remains a useful rhetorical form that meets the prescriptive and sermonic needs of the Mennonite church. Polygenesis does not serve that function nearly so well.[40]

At the very least, claiming to be Anabaptist means being knowledgeable about the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition and its historiography. It means being deliberate and intentional about the selection of theological emphases from this tradition, and being explicit about the reasons for utilizing and promoting an Anabaptist identity.

Mennonite Brethren Response to Contemporary Anabaptist Theologies

The renewal of interest in recovering an Anabaptist identity on the part of Mennonite Brethren leaders during the 1960s and 1970s stands in puzzling contrast to the widespread disinterest among Mennonite Brethren leaders in contemporary Anabaptist theology. Despite its shortcomings, Harold Bender's scholarship laid a foundation for an unprecedented revival of interest in Anabaptist history and theology during the twentieth century. Certainly the most notable theologian to emerge was the American John Howard Yoder,[41] whose magisterial influence subsequently shaped people such as Stanley Hauerwas, and helped inspire a new generation of contemporary Mennonite theologians from around the world interested in more "systematic" approaches to Anabaptist theology including people such as A. James Reimer (Canada), Thomas Finger (United States), and Fernando Enns (Netherlands).[42] Few Mennonite Brethren scholars appear to be actively contributing to the conversations within this emerging field, and few Mennonite Brethren church leaders appear to be familiar with the growing body of contemporary Anabaptist theological literature.[43] While one can only speculate as to why this is the case, I suspect that some perceive a specifically Anabaptist theology as being intentionally anti-evangelical; some are suspicious of the controversial theological trajectories presented by Mennonite theologians such as J. Denny Weaver;[44] still others consider "systematic theology" to be incompat-

ible with the longstanding Mennonite Brethren preference for "biblical theology."[45]

A spate of recent theological literature in non-Mennonite circles has begun to interact with contemporary Anabaptist theology.[46] Particularly notable is the strong emphasis on an ecclesiological missiology in the missional church materials produced by the Gospel and Our Culture Network, which includes several Mennonite writers.[47] A number of leaders associated with the emerging church movement have interacted with Anabaptist themes. Writing appreciatively is Brian McLaren, who notes that the Anabaptist emphases on community, on faith as a way of life and on peacemaking, anticipated the shortcomings of modernity.[48] More critical of Anabaptism is Jim Belcher, who appears to be interacting with a stereotypical perception of Anabaptism rather than actual Anabaptist writings.[49] Unfortunately, the treatment of Anabaptism on the part of both McLaren and Belcher is superficial at best.

Much more promising, but still underutilized by Mennonite Brethren in Canada, are the contemporary Christian expressions that explore ways to live out Anabaptist ideals without using the Mennonite, Hutterite or Amish wrappings with which it is usually associated. The Anabaptist tradition is being mined for theological resources that might be useful in a cultural milieu shaped by postmodernism. Examples include the Mustard Seed House Community in Seattle, an inter-generational, neo-monastic, intentional Christian community that has been promoted by people such as Tom and Christine Sine.[50] In Britain and Ireland, the Anabaptist Network, a loose-knit network of individuals and churches, is encouraging Christians from a wide variety of denominations to add a more distinct Anabaptist accent to their understanding of faith. The work of Stuart Murray, a person with a PhD in Anabaptist hermeneutics and years of experience in urban mission and church planting, has been helpful in bringing this network to the attention of people. His most recent book, *The Naked Anabaptist*, bluntly poses the question of whether it is necessary to be Mennonite in order to be Anabaptist. With a touch of irony Murray observes, "I have often found myself urging Mennonite students and church leaders to recover their own radical heritage as a source of renewal and inspiration. Although Mennonite scholars during the twentieth century embarked on a quest to rehabilitate Anabaptism, their passion and insights have not yet had the impact they deserve. Many Mennonites seem more interested in purpose-driven churches or the Alpha course.

Maybe Mennonite culture and traditions have stifled the Anabaptist heritage."[51] Murray's book offers a more fully-orbed articulation of Anabaptist convictions than the three distinctives outlined in Bender's Anabaptist Vision. Spelling out the full range of "core convictions" when defining Anabaptism is more helpful than simply identifying "distinctives" that set Anabaptists apart from others. The language of distinctives, or the practice of differentiating between essential and non-essentials, is invariably understood to mean less important or optional.

Mennonite Brethren as Evangelical Protestants

Eclecticism, Mennonite Brethren Origins and Identity

When examining Mennonite Brethren evangelical identity, one invariably returns yet again to the vexing questions surrounding the movement's origin. There is a consensus among Mennonite historians that multiple influences converged during the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church. From the outset, the Mennonite Brethren Church interacted with Christians from beyond Mennonite boundaries, and willingly incorporated theological ideas and practices into their own services. The most notable non-Mennonite influences included Lutheran (German) pietism, which had long been present among the Mennonites in Russia through the writings of Johann Arndt and Jung Stilling, and was vigorously promoted in the nineteenth century by people such as Eduard Wuest, Tobias Voth and leaders in the Gnadenfeld congregation (Molotschna Colony. Significant also was the German Baptist movement, which began in 1834; its influence was exercised through people such as its founder Johann G. Oncken and August G. A. Liebig in the Einlage congregation (Chortiza Colony) after 1866.[52]

Each innovation in theology or practice within the Mennonite Brethren movement has always been accompanied by a degree of controversy, but no debate has endured for as long as the discussion among Mennonite Brethren historians (and leaders) about what the eclectic multiplicity of theological influences present within the Mennonite Brethren movement might mean for how best to identify or categorize the group. As Paul Toews astutely noted in the early 1990s, how one casts "the understandings of MB birth substantially shaped the subsequent identity of the church."[53]

One of the best illustrations of this debate has been the attention given to the role of Lutheran pietism, which also happens to be one of the most important antecedents to the evangelical Protestant movement. P. M. Friesen offered an appreciative assessment of pietism's "harmonious effect" as a necessary complement to Mennonitism, which together formed a fellowship that approximates the apostolic church. He regarded Edward Wuest as the "second reformer" of the Mennonite Brethren church.[54] In 1965 Victor Adrian revisited Friesen's interpretation, and similarly suggested that pietism was "an integral part of Mennonite Brethren theology."[55] A decade later, J. A. Toews moved away from seeing pietism as the sole catalyst for spiritual renewal among the Mennonites in Russia, and placed a much greater accent on Mennonite Brethren continuity with the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition.[56] Debates about both the degree of influence from Lutheran pietism, and the value of this influence, continue. In his chapter within this volume, Abraham Friesen argues that pietism served as the "road to separation" from a Mennonite-Anabaptist theological heritage, and contributed towards a high level of ignorance about sixteenth-century Anabaptism among Mennonites in Russia.[57] In contrast stands the work of Harold Jantz who claims that pietism was not a movement fixated by the pursuit of a subjective, emotional mystical experience, as it is sometimes caricatured, but that it offered Mennonites in Russia resources for reforming the deplorable conditions in their schools and churches during the early to mid-nineteenth century.[58]

This is not the place to resolve all of the historiographical or theological debates concerning the influence of Lutheran pietists and German Baptists on the Mennonite Brethren movement in Russia. Three observations about the relationship between these multiple influences and Mennonite Brethren identity are worth noting. First, despite the fact that the early Mennonite Brethren movement clearly identified itself with the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition in Russia in substantial ways as noted above, the movement embodied some important discontinuities with their fellow Mennonites and the larger Anabaptist tradition. This included introducing the use of musical instruments along with a wider variety of hymns, choirs and extemporaneous prayer in corporate worship. It included an insistence on baptism by immersion, a more open experiential piety that required verbal testimony of a conversion experience and a claim to having received assurance of salvation,[59] a willingness to fellowship with non-Mennonites, involvement in evangelistic and missionary activity, and the use of new

organizational methods.[60] While it may be true that some, or even all, of these points of discontinuity came from influences external to the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition, the primary point is that they were central to the life of the Mennonite Brethren movement and therefore integral to their understanding of who they were. The borrowing was neither incidental nor temporary. Simply put, the Mennonite Brethren movement marked a new way of doing Mennonite that was different than anything the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition had seen before. It is a mistake to suggest that the non-Mennonite influences were somehow not a part of the true identity of the Mennonite Brethren movement. Accenting only the points of continuity with sixteenth-century Anabaptism, or the fact that they opted not to merge with the Baptists, in an attempt to establish and highlight the Mennonite Brethren Anabaptist identity, obscures and diminishes important features of Mennonite Brethren history and identity.[61] The eclectic diversity, including the occasional contradictions created by the multiplicity of influences that have shaped the Mennonite Brethren experience, is best incorporated into an inclusive both-and approach to defining identity, rather than using a polarizing either-or Anabaptist-versus-evangelical approach.[62]

Second, the renewal impulse that precipitated the new Mennonite Brethren way of being Mennonite, which became an integral feature of the Mennonite Brethren self-understanding, rested on a new ecumenism that looked not only for theological commonalities among all Christians, but also for a common religious experience. In this, the Mennonite Brethren were following a trend with roots dating back to early eighteenth-century evangelical Protestantism, which shifted the Reformation (and Anabaptist) interest in ecclesiology towards an emphasis on the individual; instead of asking "What is the 'true' church?" the central question became "What is a 'true' Christian?"[63] As the basis for Christian unity began to move away from a common theology and cooperation in common causes and came to rest in a common religious experience, new organizational forms among the partisans of revival also emerged. The recognition of, and the desire to fellowship with, other "true" Christians, despite theological differences, made cooperation and a mutual exchange of ideas and practices inevitable.

But as Paul Toews notes, "Only later would it become clear that imbibing divergent renewal currents could offer confusion as well as revitalization."[64] More important than trying to pinpoint exactly which movement was the source for the renewal impulse that gave

birth to the Mennonite Brethren Church (my own view is that this impulse is derived from German pietism), and more important than the question of whether Mennonite Brethren were genuine Anabaptists, pietists, Baptists, or even evangelical Protestants (as if the answer to these questions will settle the matter of Mennonite Brethren identity), is the recognition that ambivalence and tensions about the nature of Mennonite Brethren identity has always, and will always, be an integral part of the renewal impulse.

Third, it would not be appropriate to apply the label of "evangelical Protestant" to the early Mennonite Brethren movement if one were using only nineteenth-century connotations for the label. The twentieth century added a new range of diverse and dynamic expressions and connotations to evangelical Protestantism including Pentecostalism, fundamentalism and the "religious right." Applying these connotations to the mid-nineteenth century origins of the Mennonite Brethren movement is anachronistic. The historic and contemporary diversity among evangelical Protestants has fueled a longstanding debate about definitions within the burgeoning and increasingly sophisticated field of evangelical Protestant historiography. One of the most widely accepted scholarly definitions of evangelical Protestantism today is the elastic descriptive creedal quadrilateral designed by the British Baptist historian David Bebbington, who identifies a constellation of four emphases that characterize three centuries of trans-Atlantic evangelical Protestant diversity and dynamism.[65] Given the influences that converged within the Mennonite Brethren movement and the fact that all four features of evangelicalism are present, it is possible to say that the group has always been comfortably, unequivocally, but selectively evangelical. However, it is important to recognize that some of the more negative associations with the word "evangelical," and the fear that appropriating an evangelical identity will erode a commitment to a Mennonite-Anabaptist identity, has left some Mennonite Brethren ambivalent about the suitability of the label.[66]

Ongoing Association with Evangelical Protestants

The pietist and Baptist influences were present not only at the outset, but also continued for many years among the Mennonite Brethren. The Baptists advocated on behalf of the new Mennonite Brethren movement. Baptist missionary societies served as the sending agencies for many Mennonite Brethren missionaries. Baptist schools,

particularly Hamburg Theological Seminary and Rochester Seminary, educated and trained many Mennonite Brethren leaders. The first Mennonite Brethren Bible school in Russia was modeled after the Baptist seminary in Hamburg. Numerous Mennonite Brethren leaders participated in the Blankenburg Alliance Conference, which was established in 1885 by the Plymouth Brethren, and became a center of dispensational influence in Europe. F. W. Baedeker, a key leader of the Blankenburg movement, was a frequent speaker at Bible conferences sponsored by wealthy Mennonite landowners, and the writings of Blankenburg speakers were widely read by Mennonite Brethren ministers.[67] The itinerant Mennonite Brethren teacher, Jacob W. Reimer, served as a member of the Board of Directors of Blankenburg and helped promote their conferences.[68]

In 1902, a little more than forty years after the birth of the Mennonite Brethren church, the group completed its first Confession of Faith. It tried to situate the movement both as a part of the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition and as part of the larger network of like-minded Christians. It not only contains an insistent affirmation of being in theological continuity with other Mennonite-Anabaptists, but also expresses a desire "to foster fellowship with all believers" in order to bring about the "holy will of our Lord and Savior, 'That they all may be one.'"[69] The recognition of a broader Christian identity begins by citing the old ecumenical creeds—Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian. Notes in the Introduction to the Confession indicate that various Baptist, Elberfelder, Herrnhuter, Methodist, Reformed and Lutheran confessional and doctrinal statements were consulted in addition to Mennonite-Anabaptist sources. While ecumenical efforts "to foster spiritual fellowship with all believers" are applauded, the Confession also cites doctrinal differences, especially regarding military service, as the reason for not amalgamating with "other evangelical Anabaptists." Such declarations were intended, at least in part, to allay lingering perceptions that the Mennonite Brethren movement was really more Baptist than Mennonite, but also to acknowledge the value of their ongoing relationship to other Protestant groups including the Baptists.[70]

The early and ongoing influence of pietism among the Mennonite Brethren in Russia, with its stress on a personal salvation experience that unifies all Christians, along with a rigorous biblicism and a strong emphasis on missions, created a natural compatibility with the priorities of evangelical Protestants in North America. Although somewhat

separated from other evangelical Protestant denominations in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century by linguistic and cultural differences, it did not take long before this affinity resulted in contact and an appreciative borrowing of resources during the first half of the twentieth century. This compatibility, together with the significant degree of contact, borrowing of resources and involvement, gradually evolved into a remarkably close association with the larger evangelical Protestant community in Canada during the second half of the century. "Whether some like it or not," observed Richard Kyle,

> the Mennonite Brethren [became] part of the kaleidoscope that makes up North American evangelicalism... Because evangelicalism does not share some important Anabaptist distinctives does not mean that the Mennonite Brethren are not part of North American evangelicalism, any more than it means that Pentecostals are not evangelicals because mainstream evangelicals do not speak in tongues.[71]

In addition to the influence of radio broadcasts and the Christian literature distributed by evangelical organizations, the numerous Mennonite Brethren Bible schools in particular served as conduits through which evangelical Protestant theological ideas and practices were disseminated throughout the denomination. They served as the point of convergence between Mennonite-Anabaptist, European pietistic and North American evangelical influences, which then permeated the denomination through the influence of teachers and students. Although the Bible schools operated by the Mennonite Brethren had a relatively homogenous ethnic heritage in common, variations in theological ethos existed from school to school. Generally, the Mennonite Brethren, who had been in the United States prior to relocating to Canada, were more aggressive in the promotion of evangelical Protestant emphases and methods borrowed from fundamentalist Bible schools in the United States (for example, William Bestvater at Herbert Bible School), whereas some of the immigrants arriving from Russia after 1920 tended to more strongly stress certain cultural and Anabaptist themes (for example, A. H. Unruh at Winkler Bible Institute).

The Bible schools solidified Mennonite Brethren connections with North American evangelicals in a variety of ways. A number of the

early teachers took their training at fundamentalist institutions such as Moody Bible Institute, Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training Institute, and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Involvement with the Evangelical Teacher Training Association brought not only a prescribed curriculum in the area of Christian education, but also a more familial affiliation with other evangelical schools and educators. As the need for English-language textbooks, library resources and Sunday school materials grew, Bible school teachers looked again towards the evangelical schools in the United States with which they were familiar. The use of textbooks written and published by American evangelicals was extensive throughout the Mennonite Brethren Bible schools. The theological ethos of the Mennonite Brethren schools gradually became more homogenous as the surviving schools became more integrated with, and accountable to, denominational structures.

The response to ongoing Mennonite Brethren involvement in, and borrowing from, a variety of evangelical groups, has been mixed. It contributed substantially towards, what J. B. Toews called, "an awakening effect" among young people, and "the surge of missionary vision and commitment from 1930-1960," but it also contributed to a legacy of ambivalence with regard to their identity as a faith community and their place within the larger Mennonite and evangelical Protestant worlds.[72] Nevertheless, their natural compatibility with evangelical Protestantism, together with the significant degree of contact, borrowing of resources and involvement, laid the foundation for a remarkably close association and explicit identification, with the larger evangelical community in Canada during the second half of the century.[73]

The decade of the 1960s marked an important watershed not only for the Mennonite Brethren (as noted above), but also for evangelical Protestants in Canada in general. As evangelical Protestants became more affluent and better educated, they began to feel less like estranged outsiders in Canadian culture and more like cultural insiders with a sense of responsibility for the character of Canadian society. As the different denominational groups that made up the evangelical Protestant mosaic emerged from their respective enclaves they began to discover one another, creating what John G. Stackhouse, Jr. describes as, "a mutually supportive network of interlocking institutions, organizations and individuals" that has characterized evangelical Protestantism in Canada since 1960.[74] The Mennonite Brethren contributed more than any other Mennonite group in Canada towards the formation of this evangelical network.

The desire to be an integral part of a larger multi-denominational evangelical network in Canada was marked formally by the participation of prominent Mennonite Brethren leaders, including those who identified with Bender's Anabaptist vision (e.g., Frank C. Peters and John Redekop) in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, an organization started in 1964 to further the collective social action interests of evangelical Protestants. In 1973 the Mennonite Brethren formally became members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, a move that signaled both their willingness to identify and work with other evangelical Protestants, and their growing interest in tackling social issues in a more public and political way.[75] The entry into the consortium of seminaries at Trinity Western University on the part of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in 1999 rather than establish their own stand-alone seminary campus in Canada again indicated Mennonite Brethren willingness to collaborate in a common cause with evangelical denominations. One would be hard pressed to find an evangelical Protestant institution and organization in Canada that has not received significant support from the Mennonite Brethren. The preference given to such relationships, and their longevity, is indicative of how integral these evangelical influences were, and still are, to Mennonite Brethren identity.

In comparison with their counterparts in the United States, the Mennonite Brethren in Canada have played a much more prominent role in the development and life of evangelical Protestant institutions and organizations.[76] This is due in part to the fact that Mennonite Brethren in Canada comprise a larger proportion of Protestant demographics than is the case in the United States (attendance in Mennonite Brethren congregations in Canada represents about 4% of the total attendance in evangelical Protestant churches). It may also be that Mennonite Brethren have found evangelical Protestants in Canada to be less nationalistic and militaristic, more theologically diverse, and therefore more compatible compatriots.

It comes as no surprise to see Mennonite Brethren in Canada appropriate the label "evangelical" for themselves; it simply made explicit what had long been a reality.[77] It is difficult to determine precisely when the dual label of evangelical Anabaptist was first used to name Mennonite Brethren identity, but it suddenly comes into public usage during the 1980s, and has continued to the present despite some ambiguity about its meaning. It is used, for example, by the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel in a pastoral letter in

1986, "Another change which we see evident in our churches is a diversity in theological thinking. While we believe ourselves to be a strong Anabaptist-Evangelical church, there appears to be a lack of clarity as to what that means."[78] One of the most concerted efforts to promote the potential value of a dual label came from John H. Redekop, who was motivated by the need to recapture and clarify Anabaptism for a people who have "partially lost their theological way." Using the results of a national survey of Mennonite Brethren in Canada, he concluded that the label Mennonite Brethren was detrimental and vigorously asserted that the name of the denomination should instead include the two adjectives "Evangelical Anabaptist"; he enumerated numerous reasons for why it was "not only a good alternative, but an excellent designation."[79]

Although Redekop was not successful in convincing the denomination to change its name, his "modest proposal" for a name change did lead to the widespread acceptance of the evangelical Anabaptist label.[80] An *apologia* for using the dual label as a description of the denomination's theological identity appeared in a paper presented by Walter Unger in 1991 at a Canadian Board of Faith and Life Conference where he argued that Mennonite Brethren can, and should, be *both* evangelical and Anabaptist if they hope to overcome the polarities that exist between those who prefer one label over the other.[81] The Mennonite Brethren must "relate to the best insights" of both traditions, "all the while allowing Scripture to be the ultimate arbiter of faith and action." In the same year, an issue of *Direction* was dedicated to the topic of Mennonite Brethren and evangelicalism; in it Richard Kyle emphasized the necessity of using both labels to describe what is a reality in the Mennonite Brethren story.[82] Similarly, an "Exhortation" issued to the Canadian Conference by the Board of Faith and Life in 2000 asked members "to resolve to be both Anabaptist and evangelical in the best of sense of those terms."[83] In 2008 MBBS published a "Theological Witness Statement" that offers a succinct affirmation and explanation of the features of a dual evangelical Anabaptist theological identity.[84] The message seems to have been well received: a recent survey indicated that more than half (51%) of the Mennonite Brethren pastors in Canada identify themselves primarily as "Anabaptist Evangelical," in contrast to 44% who use only one or the other of these two labels.[85] Another survey reports that at least 65% of Mennonite Brethren leaders want Mennonite Brethren graduate theological education to be both Anabaptist and evangelical

in orientation.[86] As noted above, the dual label now appears as part of the official descriptions of both the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference and the US Mennonite Brethren Conference.

Mennonite Brethren and the Scholarship on Evangelical Protestantism

In recent decades the scholarly study of evangelical Protestantism has become a virtual cottage industry in North America. This scholarship is increasingly aware of the way evangelical Protestantism became a global phenomenon during the twentieth century,[87] which has also occurred among the Mennonite Brethren.[88] Despite being a significant part of the evangelical melange in Canada, Mennonite Brethren historiography has generally been done in isolation without attention to how developments within the Mennonite Brethren story might be a part of larger patterns within evangelical Protestantism. Any analysis of the history of the Mennonite Brethren movement will invariably be enriched by locating it alongside and within this burgeoning body of scholarship.

Familiarity with this literature will help Mennonite Brethren understand themselves better. One extended example will suffice: virtually every theological or cultural conflict that has emerged in the last century among North American evangelicals has also found its way into the Mennonite Brethren community. The range of theological topics that have been addressed through denominational study conferences and publications such as *Direction* readily demonstrates this reality. Some specific examples include gifts of the Holy Spirit (1956), preservation of the believer (1958), inspiration of Scripture (1967), divorce and remarriage (1968, 1980), the charismatic movement and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1971), eschatology (1958, 1978), women in church ministry (1976, 1980, 1989), exclusivity of Christ (1991), church growth (1991), spiritual warfare (2001), and many others.[89] The theological ferment currently taking place among Mennonite Brethren in Canada regarding missional church ecclesiology, the "emerging church"[90] and atonement theologies are further examples of how differences within the larger evangelical Protestant world continue to be felt within the Mennonite Brethren world today.

One of the persistent issues underlying some of the tensions among evangelical Protestants today has to do with questions about the scope of the label "evangelical." Should the tent be as inclusive as possible

or does the tent need to be trimmed in size?[91] Is it only a descriptive historical and sociological category, or is it a point of reference for designating a specific set of theological convictions? And if it is the latter, what should those theological convictions be? People such as Donald Dayton and Mark Noll have consistently been voices advocating for the inclusion of a wide range of Protestant groups that were either a part of eighteenth and nineteenth century revivals and awakenings in the mostly English-speaking transatlantic world, or were subsequent descendants of these religious movements (for example, fundamentalism and Pentecostalism).[92] Many have found David Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism mentioned above useful for the way it recognizes a range of variation within each of the four emphases, and for the way these emphases serve as approximate theological boundaries.

The broad approach to the history of evangelicalism used by historians such as Mark Noll and David Bebbington identifies pietism and puritanism as the two main antecedents of the revivals that birthed and shaped modern evangelical Christianity. These two streams, one somewhat more individual, experiential and pragmatic in its ethos (and often more Arminian), and the other somewhat more intentionally public in its focus, and more doctrinal (and often more Reformed or Calvinistic), flowed together to form evangelical Protestantism, a movement convinced that "God could actually, actively and almost tangibly transform repentant sinners who put their trust in him."[93]

According to Roger Olson, the mingling of these two streams created an "unstable compound" that has, despite common convictions and commitments, generated tension and turmoil throughout the history of the movement.[94] It would be inappropriate and simplistic to attribute all conflicts among evangelical Protestants only to this one factor, and many evangelical expressions contain a mixture of influences from both antecedent movements; nevertheless, there is validity to Olson's observation. The heirs of these two antecedent movements do continue to understand the nature of evangelicalism in somewhat different ways, with some even questioning the ongoing usefulness of the evangelical label.

Some individuals, such as Daryl Hart, claim that the evangelical label has become meaningless since being co-opted by "neo-evangelicals" to encompass a broad range of "conservative" Christians. According to Hart, a staunch Presbyterian, there is not enough creedal conformity within the movement; not all groups under the big evangelical umbrella manifest what he considers to be the three true marks

of the church: right preaching of the Word of God, correct administration of the sacraments and discipline that upholds the first two.[95] Evangelical theologians Don A. Carson and David Wells have also expressed their displeasure about the doctrinal pluralism among evangelicals.[96] This "puritan" undercurrent has resulted in the formation of a variety of new networks intent on reinforcing doctrinal (and methodological) precision (read conformity) among evangelicals, and generally favor a narrowing of the definition of evangelical (e.g., Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals [www.alliancenet.org], The Gospel Coalition [www.thegospelcoalition.org], and Together for the Gospel [www.t4g.org]). These networks are all Reformed (Calvinistic) in their theological orientation.

Other evangelical theologians such as the late Donald Bloesch, Kenneth Collins, the late Stanley Grenz, and Roger Olson appreciate and celebrate the richness that diversity brings.[97] They all appeal to a theological center made up of certain shared themes, but recognize the need for greater diversity in theological method. They object, for example, to the rationalistic methods of Protestant scholasticism used by fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals that transformed specific doctrines (for example, the inspiration of Scripture) from an article of faith into *the* primary foundation for evangelical theology. This may have been an appropriate approach for one cultural context, but these theologians suggest that there is now a need to cultivate an apologetic evangelical theology appropriate to a post-Christian, postmodern context. Many Mennonite Brethren resonate with Grenz's appeal to a communitarian ecclesiology as a way for "a renewed missional evangelical ecumenism."[98]

Understanding the tensions created by the undercurrents within evangelical Protestantism in North America is essential for understanding some of the current discussions within the Mennonite Brethren conference. The significant influence of the pietist tradition, the fact that the Mennonite Brethren in Canada were not involved in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, along with 150 years of experience in selecting and balancing emphases and practices blended through the convergence of Mennonite-Anabaptist and evangelical Protestant traditions, has tilted the Mennonite Brethren in the direction of an appreciation for diversity. This is not to suggest that Mennonite Brethren are not interested in theology—they remain a people deeply committed to the study and teaching of Scripture; it is

to say that Mennonite Brethren have a greater tolerance for latitude on some doctrinal issues than those evangelicals who have puritan roots.

As noted above, many within the larger evangelical Protestant movement wonder whether it will be possible to maintain a sense of unity amid the ever increasing diversity.[99] Not surprisingly, this same question is occasionally asked within the Mennonite Brethren world. In 1991 Walter Unger prophetically called the denomination to "a unity of confession and mission" that is both evangelical and Anabaptist. Citing the evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch, he concluded, "there is hope not only for a unified evangelicalism but for the unity of the church at large 'if each recognizes that the one foundation for the faith is not a set of beliefs but a living Person who speaks anew in every age through the Bible and the church's commentary on Scripture.'"[100]

Conclusion

I have argued that the dual evangelical Anabaptist label offers an accurate indication of the two traditions within the history of Christianity that have contributed most to shaping Mennonite Brethren identity, theology and practice. A greater awareness of our historical eclecticism, as well as the selectivity with which we have engaged both the Anabaptist and evangelical Protestant traditions—and our interpretations of this eclecticism and selectivity—is necessary for being more confident and assertive about a "Mennonite Brethren" theological identity. The intentional use of this dual label during the 1980s signaled an important shift. Its use served as a recognition that the group's historic eclecticism had resulted in a unique theological legacy that is identifiable, and that when the best from both traditions is selected, it has much to offer: among Mennonite-Anabaptists, it brings an evangelical Protestant accent; among evangelical Protestants it brings an Anabaptist accent. A dual theological identity offers a unique way of seeing: it offers an ideal vantage point from which to evaluate both historic and contemporary expressions of these two traditions. Moreover, a dual theological identity brings with it a richer repository of resources from which to draw in response to the needs of a postmodern, post-Christian society.

Endnotes

1 http://www.mbconf.ca/home/about_us/ (emphasis mine).

2 "Double-barrel" refers to the practice in many western countries of creating a family name with two parts, which may or may not be joined with a hyphen.

3 The Mennonite Brethren are not the only Mennonite group to use the dual evangelical Anabaptist label to describe their theological identity (e.g., Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference and the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches [formerly known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference]).

4 Lynn Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds. Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), 43.

5 See "Document of Secession," in Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Howard Loewen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 230-232. The combination of harsh denunciations and the claim to be followers of Menno Simons was understood by some as an exclusive claim on the part of the Mennonite Brethren to be the only true Mennonites.

6 Cited in Abram J. Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith: Historic Roots and Comparative Analysis" (S.T.M. thesis, Union College of British Columbia, 1965), 45.

7 "Introduction to the Confession of Faith of 1900," in *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Identity*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1997), 108. The early interest on the part of the Mennonite Brethren runs counter to the claim of some historians that they were not concerned about creedal statements. For example, see J. B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 18-19.

8 See Howard John Loewen, "An Orientation," in *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985): 23-30.

9 Cited in John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 363-364.

10 Heinrich Epp, *Recollections from the life and work of the late Elder Abraham Unger founder of the Einlage Mennonite Brethren Congregation (Light and dark sides, unadorned)* (1907); cited in Ida Toews and Ken Reddig, "Historical Endnotes," *Direction* 19, no. 2 (1990): 134-135. Abraham Unger, another key leader in the Einlage congregation, issued a similar declaration in which he explicitly denies starting a "new teaching or sect." His primary concern is that "the elders of the colonies in the Chortitz municipality are not implementing the Mennonite Confession of Faith" (Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 137.)

11 "Report of the State Investigator for the Evangelical Lutheran General Consistory Alexander K. Brune," in *The Story of the Early Mennonite Brethren (1860-1869): Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman*, ed. John B. Toews

(Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 104-117. Brune concluded that the "sectarians" need to be differentiated from the other Mennonites in Russia, but that they do fit within the broader Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition. Given the multiplicity of influences that contributed to the formation of the Mennonite Brethren, there has always been speculation about the possibility of self-interested motivations for the vigorous attempts on the part of the early Mennonite Brethren to maintain their identity as Mennonites. The motivations for the denunciations on the part of some Mennonite Church leaders who tried to ban the movement as a "secret society" are equally suspect. Some were more interested in undermining and destroying the new movement than in obtaining an accurate understanding of the new movement's theological consistency with the Mennonite Anabaptist tradition.

12 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 72-75; and P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 478-479.

13 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 61.

14 "Introduction to the Confession of Faith of 1900," in *Moving Beyond Secession*, 109.

15 John E. Toews recognized the need to differentiate Anabaptism from so-called "Mennonite" ethnicity. See "The Meaning of Anabaptism for the Mennonite Brethren Church," in *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History*, ed. Paul Toews (Fresno: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1977), 167-168. See also Bruce L. Guenther, "From Isolation and Ethnic Homogeneity to Acculturation and Multi-cultural Diversity: The Mennonite Brethren and Canadian Culture," *Direction* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 151-153.

16 Bruce L. Guenther, "'Wrenching Our Youth Away from Frivolous Pursuits': Mennonite Brethren Involvement in Bible Schools in Western Canada, 1913-1960," *Crux* 38, no. 4 (December 2002): 32-41.

17 Harold Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Church History* 13, no. 1 (1944): 3-24; and *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18, no. 2 (1944): 67-88.

18 Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1996), 241.

19 For a fuller discussion of Bender's "Anabaptist Vision" see Albert Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1998): 306-331; Albert Keim, "The Anabaptist Vision: The History of a New Paradigm," *Conrad Grebel Review* 12 (Fall 1994): 239-255; and Walter Klaassen, "'There were Giants on Earth in Those Days': Harold S. Bender and the Anabaptist Vision," *Conrad Grebel Review* 12 (Fall 1994): 239-255.

20 Abe Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (1995): 72.

21 Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," 75.

22 Katie Funk Wiebe, *You Never Gave Me a Name: One Mennonite Woman's Story* (Telford: Dreamseeker Books, 2009), 38-39; cited in Doug Heidebrecht, "Katie Funk Wiebe Tells Her Story: A Personal and Communal Narrative History," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2010): 120.

23 J.B. Toews, "The M.B. Biblical Seminary," in *The Seminary Story: Twenty Years of Education in Ministry, 1955-1975*, ed. A. J. Klassen (California: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1975), 18.

24 Toews, "The M.B. Biblical Seminary," *The Seminary Story,* 20-21.

25 George Konrad, for example, recognized the Mennonite Brethren theological compatibility with "mainstream evangelical Protestantism," but focused on how MBBS wrestles with the challenge of translating an "Anabaptist view of the church, the Scriptures, and discipleship" into an educational model. See George Konrad, "Training for Leadership: The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary," *Direction* 5, no. 3 (July 1976): 27-29.

26 Paul Toews, "Two Moments in the Search for a Mennonite Brethren Identity," *Direction* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 18-30.

27 A.H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde, 1860-1954* (Winnipeg: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955).

28 For example Jacob P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, trans. D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1973); and the English translation of P. M. Friesen's massive work.

29 Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," 75-77; Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, *A Man of His Word: A Biography of John A. Toews* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1992); and David Ewert, *Honour Such People* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1997), 67-81.

30 John A. Toews, "Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Historiography," *Direction* 3, no. 2 (July 1974): 217-223. When attributing particular theological views held by some Mennonite Brethren as the result of accepting "external" influences that are incompatible with essence of real Anabaptism, it is difficult to avoid a kind of paternalism that inadvertently portrays such persons either as deviants or hapless victims.

31 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 3-4. A similar perspective was offered by his colleague at MBBC, Frank C. Peters, "The Early Mennonite Brethren: Baptist or Anabaptist?" *Mennonite Life* (October 1959): 176-178.

32 Toews, "Two Moments in Search for a Mennonite Brethren Identity," 28.

33 "Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith" (1975), in *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America*, 175.

34 Howard J. Loewen, "A Confessing People," *Direction* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 21-31. The most recent revision of the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith took place in the 1990s: considerable effort was made to utilize the results of a broadly consultative "community hermeneutic" (Lynn Jost, "Reflections on Confession of Faith Revision," *Direction* 27, no. 1 [1998]: 57-62). Although the fuller *Confession of Faith Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000) offers considerably more explanation for understanding each article, the text of the Confession itself does not explicitly claim continuity with Anabaptism.

35 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1975), 112-117. Interestingly, 100% of Mennonite Brethren scored in the high or middle range of what the authors called the "fundamentalist" scale (the broader "evangelical" label was not used). See also John B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, Al Dueck, eds., "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile 1972-1982," *Direction* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 2-89; and Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," 83-84.

36 Doug Heidebrecht, "2010 Forum - Pastoral Survey Questionnaire (July 2009)"; and "*Mennonite Brethren Herald* Reader Survey, 1998."

37 Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1973), 93.

38 James Stayer, Werner Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49, no. 2 (April 1975): 83-121. See also Werner O. Packull, "Some Reflections on the State of Anabaptist History: The Demise of a Normative Vision," *Studies in Religion* 8, no. 3 (1979): 313-323; James Stayer, "The Easy Demise of a Normative Vision of Anabaptism," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Calvin Wall Redekop, and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 109-116; Werner O. Packull, "Between Paradigms: Anabaptist Studies at the Crossroads," *Conrad Grebel Review* 8 (Winter 1990): 1-22; Rodney Sawatsky, "The One and the Many: The Recovery of Mennonite Pluralism," in *Anabaptism Revisited*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1992), 141-154; and Rodney J. Sawatsky, "The Quest for a Mennonite Hermeneutic," *Conrad Grebel Review* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 1-20.

39 Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 395.

40 Arnold Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology," in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology,* ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 6. For a fuller discussion of the implications of polygenesis historiography for Mennonite historians and theologians see Bruce L. Guenther, "Rediscovering the Value of History and Tradition," in *Out of the Strange Silence: The Challenge of Being Christian in the 21st Century,* ed. Brad Thiessen (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2005), 187-202.

41 See Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

42 See A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001). Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*; and Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence*, trans. Helmut Harder (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2007).

43 Notable exceptions include Brian Cooper, "Human Reason or Reasonable Humanity? Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Menno Simons and the Catholic Natural Law Tradition (PhD diss., Toronto School of Theology, 2006); and Paul Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion: Post-Christendom Protestant Political Theology in John Howard Yoder and Oliver O'Donovan* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).

44 For example, J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

45 Note Alfred Neufeld's comments about the Mennonite Brethren reticence in acknowledging their own "systematic" approach to theology by utilizing synonyms such as patterns, themes, paradigms, etc. ("Barth, Yoder, and J. B. Toews: My Personal Search for Systematics in Biblical Theology," *Direction* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 104-133).

46 See John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Transition* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2001).

47 See for example Lois Barrett in Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

48 Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 223-233.

49 Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 116-118, 188-189.

50 http://www.mustardseedhouse.wordpress.com; and Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

51 Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2010), 17.

52 Particularly useful is the work of Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "Mennonite Brethren and German Baptists in Russia: Affinities and Dissimilarities," in *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 97-112; "Baptist Influences on Mennonite Brethren with an Emphasis on the Practice of Immersion," *Direction* 8, no. 4 (October 1979): 33-38; and "August G.A. Liebig: German Baptist Missionary and Friend to the Mennonite Brethren," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2010): 167-186.

53 Paul Toews, "Differing Historical Imaginations and the Changing Identity of the Mennonite Brethren," in *Anabaptism Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/ Mennonite Studies in Honor of C.J. Dyck*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1992), 158. See also Alfred Neufeld's chapter in this volume, which lists the various ways Mennonite historians have interpreted the origins of the Mennonite Brethren movement.

54 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia,* 205-227. See also Harold Jantz, "A Pietist Pastor and the Russian Mennonites: The Legacy of Eduard Wuest," *Direction* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 232-246.

55 J.A. Toews, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 26, 1965: special insert, 2-11.

56 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 32.

57 Much harsher than Friesen is the critique of pietism expressed in many issues of *Preservings*, a journal published by the Delbert F. Plett Foundation.

58 Harold Jantz, "Pietism's Gift to Russian Mennonites," *Direction* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 58-73.

59 See John B. Toews, "Patterns of Piety Among the Early Mennonite Brethren," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 12 (1994): 137-155; John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren and Conversion," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993): 76-97; and the chapter by Andrew Dyck in this volume. The Mennonite Brethren emphasis on conversion marked a shift towards a more Protestant understanding of soteriology.

60 Numerous historians have noted the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren schism and a mid-nineteenth-century setting that was experiencing sweeping economic, political and cultural changes. For example, see David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789-1914" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1933); James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of*

Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889 (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989); John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets & Mennonites* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1982), and *Perilous Journey: The Mennonite Brethren in Russia, 1860-1910* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1988); E.K. Francis, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, 1789-1914: A Sociological Interpretation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25 (1951): 173-182; and Adolf Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart* (Langensalza: Beltz, 1932).

61 J. B. Toews expressed appreciation for many aspects of the "external" evangelical influences that shaped Mennonite Brethren identity, but laments the tensions that have resulted. He considers these "external" influences deficient when compared to "the biblical perspective" ("Mennonite Brethren Identity and Theological Adversity," in *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History,* ed. Paul Toews [Fresno: Center for MB Studies, 1977], 154). It is true that the multiplicity of influences that have converged within the Mennonite Brethren world have caused conflicts, but any claim to judge them all from "the biblical perspective" is bound to encounter some historiographical if not also theological turbulence. For example, the generically labeled "Anabaptist" theological paradigm being used by Toews as the final arbiter is based on a rather selective reading of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement. Moreover, use of the adjective "external," automatically precludes the possibility that these influences might, in fact, be integral to a Mennonite Brethren sense of identity, and inadvertently portrays his Mennonite Brethren predecessors as hapless victims, as deviants from a higher standard. Many of the perspectives and practices labeled as "external" by Toews were knowingly and willingly appropriated precisely because early Mennonite Brethren leaders believed them to be "biblical."

62 See Paul Toews, "Differing Historical Imaginations and the Changing Identity of the Mennonite Brethren," 157.

63 For a fuller discussion of the implications of this shift for Protestant ecclessiology see Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 287-324.

64 Paul Toews, "Differing Historical Imaginations," 157.

65 According to Bebbington, "There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible, and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism"(*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989], 1-19). See also Bruce L. Guenther, "A Road Less Traveled: The Evangelical Path of Kanadier Mennonites Who Returned to Canada," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004): 145-166.

66 See Harry Loewen, "Ambivalence in Mennonite Brethren Self-Understanding: An 1860 Continuum?" *Direction* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 5-7; Richard Kyle, "The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism: An Ambivalent Relationship," *Direction* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 26-37; and Bruce L. Guenther, "Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 223-240.

67 Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Identity and Theological Adversity," 134-143.

68 Reimer, along with Jacob Friesen who had received his theological training in Germany, were among the Mennonite Brethren leaders who advocated in favor of armed self-defense (*die Selbstshutz*) at the All Mennonite Conferences at Rueckenau in 1917 and Lichtenau in 1918. People such as B. B. Janz attributed this support to the influence of the Alliance movement of Europe. See Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Identity and Theological Adversity," 134-143; and Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 108.

69 "Introduction to the Confession of Faith of 1900," in *Moving Beyond Secession*, 109.

70 The exchange between J. J. Braun (Mennonite Brethren), and David Epp (Russian Mennonite Church) in 1910 offers considerable insight into the actions that perpetuated the lingering suspicion that Mennonite Brethren were Baptist (*Moving Beyond Secession*, 117-166).

71 Kyle, "The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism," 27, 35.

72 Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith,* 193.

73 See Guenther, "Living with the Virus," 223-240; and Patricia Janzen Loewen, "Embracing Evangelicalism and Anabaptism: The Mennonite Brethren in Canada in the Late Twentieth Century" (M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 2000).

74 John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "The Emergence of a Fellowship: Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century," *Church History* 60, no. 2 (June 1991): 248.

75 See Harold Jantz, "Editorial: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada—Let's Get With It," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 21, 1969, 11; and Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 389.

76 Harold Jantz, "Canadian Mennonites and a Widening World," in *Religion and Public Life in Canada*, ed. Marguerite Van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 329-345.

77 See for example the chapter by Sam Reimer in this volume which shows that more than 80% of Mennonite Brethren congregations are comfortable with being identified as "evangelical."

78 "Herbert Brandt, "A Pastoral Letter: A Call to Reason Together," *Direction* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 4-7.

79 *Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren: A People Apart* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 160-161. Not everyone agreed with Redekop's promotion of the evangelical Anabaptist label: see Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Definitions and Temptations," *Mennonite Brethren Bible College Bulletin* (Spring 1985), 3-5; and Paul Toews, "Review of *A People Apart* or Pulling Apart a People," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987): 144-148. The publication of Redekop's book, and a subsequent symposium in 1987 on Faith and Ethnicity among Mennonite Brethren, served as an important catalyst for identifying and discussing a range of issues related to the relationship between Mennonite history, theology, identity and ethnicity. See *Direction* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1988).

80 The label is conspicuously absent from the more informal and anecdotal denominational history published by J. B. Toews in 1993 (*A Pilgrimage of Faith*). He acknowledges the multiple influences in the origins of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and recognizes the identification of the Mennonite Brethren

with North American evangelicalism, but consistently and deliberately uses only the label "Mennonite Brethren" throughout. The dual label is, however, used in the volume published to commemorate the work of the bi-national General Conference. For example, see Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance,"53.

81 Walter Unger, "Anabaptist/Evangelical Cooperation and Unity: How Much?" Canadian Conference: Board of Faith and Life Symposium on Christology, Camp Arnes, MB, February 2-3, 1991.

82 Kyle, "The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism," 26-37.

83 *85th Convention of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Hepburn, SK, 2000)* (Winnipeg: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 2000), 103.

84 "Theological Witness Statement," *inTouch* (Fall/Winter 2008): 4-5; and Tim Geddert, "What's in a name?" *inTouch* (Fall/Winter 2008): 6-7.

85 Doug Heidebrecht, "2010 Forum—Pastoral Survey Questionnaire (July 2009)."

86 Survey done by the MBBS Board Task Force on Graduate Theological Education, 2010.

87 See for example Don Lewis, ed., *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009); and Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

88 Abe J. Dueck, ed., *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2010).

89 A collection of papers presented by David Ewert serves as another example of the breadth of issues addressed by the Mennonite Brethren during the second half of the twentieth century (*Finding Your Way: Confronting Issues in the Mennonite Brethren Church* [Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1999]). Ewert spoke into a remarkable number of the theological issues facing the Mennonite Brethren during the second half of the twentieth century.

90 See Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today* 51, no. 2 (February 2007); and articles in *Direction* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2010).

91 See for example the debates between Donald Dayton and George Marsden during the late 1970s (Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* [New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976]; George M. Marsden, "Demythologizing Evangelicalism: A Review of Donald W. Dayton's *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*," *Christian Scholar's Review* 7, no. 2/3 (1977): 203-207; and Dayton, "A Reply to George Marsden, 'Demythologizing Evangelicalism,'" *Christian Scholar's Review* 7, no. 2/3 (1977): 203-207).

92 Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1991); and Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

93 Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 65.

94 Roger Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Post-Conservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 48. For an exploration of

how the different streams within Protestantism approach words such as "conservative" and "evangelical, "see Craig Allert, "Evangelical Identities: Streams of Confluence and Historical Theology in Evangelicalism," *Canadian Evangelical Review* 37-38 (Spring 2010): 5-24.

95 D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 123-124.

96 See D. A Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); D. A. Carson, *Evangelicalism: What is It and Is It Worth Keeping* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011); and David Wells, *No Place For Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

97 Kenneth J. Collins, *The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of an American Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 14; Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983); Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*; and Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*.

98 Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 19.

99 Roger Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," *Christianity Today* 42, no. 2 (Feb 9, 1998): 40.

100 Donald Bloesch, *Christianity Today* (February 19, 1990): 17, cited in Walter Unger, "Anabaptist/Evangelical Cooperation and Unity: How Much?" Study Conference paper, 1991.

Mennonite Brethren Beginnings: Background and Influences

Abraham Friesen

Every religious movement emerges from a specific religious, social and political context. This context contributes to its ultimate contours. And, as the Reformation era shows, once a religious movement has taken shape and developed a systematic theology, it can continue on its course for centuries with only slight modifications.[1] Beginnings are therefore of critical importance. Mennonite Brethren beginnings are no exception. This chapter will briefly examine one specific aspect of the religious context—the state of the Ukrainian Mennonite Church's morality—and then consider three of the usually alleged religious influences that helped shape the early Mennonite Brethren movement: pietism, Menno Simons' writings and the German Baptists.

Most new movements within Christianity seek to justify their separation from the mother church by accusing the latter of corruption. But the accusation of corruption is meaningless if the reformers do not present something better in its place. On January 6, 1860, the eighteen leaders of the seceding group formally issued such a charge of corruption. In their document of secession they stated: 1) that the "Mennonite Brotherhood" was decadent and that, as a result, the signers feared God's judgment upon it; and 2) that the signers were therefore forced to dissociate themselves from it.

How did they hope to correct this pervasive corruption? First, by reinstituting a baptism on a genuine, living faith and abolishing baptism on a memorized faith; second, by allowing only believers to come to the communion table; third, by reviving the practice of foot washing; fourth, by only appointing preachers clearly called either by God or by the believers; and lastly, by banning all reprobate and carnal sinners from the fellowship of believers. What the document does not say is how these men arrived at their demands and what influenced their formulation. A reassessment of the role of pietism, Menno's writings

and German Baptism during the early years of the movement may be of help here.

The Charge of Decadence

I will begin with the question of decadence in the Ukrainian Mennonite Church.[2] Were the signers justified in declaring the "Mennonite Brotherhood" decadent? Is there evidence to that effect, and if so, what is it? And if there was corruption, did it justify secession? A repeated response to the accusation from within the larger church was that if there was corruption, the reformers should have worked from within to correct it. The same charge was made against Luther in the early years of the Reformation. But if, like the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, the parent church has no intention of reforming, will it tolerate reformers? Luther did not leave the church; he was excommunicated. The original Mennonite Brethren, however, appear to have left the church.

With respect to the charge of corruption it has to be recognized that the elders of the church never denied the charge of decadence. Indeed, Elder Lenzmann of the Gnadenfeld congregation defended the state of the church by employing Augustine's misinterpretation of the Parable of the Tares. In that interpretation, Augustine had argued that the "field" in which the wheat and the tares had been sown was the "Church," although Christ had clearly told his disciples it was the "world." Given Augustine's interpretation, the wheat and the tares had to be tolerated in the church "until the time of harvest," the end of the age. By its very nature, therefore, the church was a "mixed" body; it could never be "without spot or wrinkle."[3] If this definition of the church applied, could the Mennonite Church of the Ukraine ever be reformed? Lenzmann was challenged on this point in a letter to the *Mennonitische Blätter* by Jacob Martens, a member of the Ohrloff congregation. Martens stated, "...the church members know as well as we do that the 'world' is the soil where believers and unbelievers are to grow side by side; the church of God, however, should not have to remove the wicked from its midst."[4] In other words, there were to be no tares in the church.[5] As will be shown, Martens' view was also essentially that of the secessionists. Could the gulf between these two views of the church have been bridged? If the conflict between the Reformation Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformers is any indication, it could not.

The early Mennonite Brethren contention that the Molotschna Mennonite Church was corrupt was confirmed by Alexander K. Brune, the Lutheran minister sent by the St. Petersburg government to investigate the problem at its source.[6] P. M. Friesen, in his history, later produced a considerable amount of evidence to confirm it. And Peter Braun, a Mennonite Brethren who was elected in 1917 as the Russian Mennonite archivist, discovered that in 1856, four years before the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church, the Molotschna Agricultural Society had asked the colony's teachers to describe the moral condition of the people in their villages. Thirty-seven teachers responded. They all made the same devastating assessment. In a letter to his brother Abraham, Peter Braun described the contents of the responses. These included references to coarseness, roughness, insolence, obstinacy, habitual drinking, cursing, infamous actions, squabbling, dishonest business practices, indecent conduct, even in the churches, debauchery, even at weddings, wild singing, dancing, hard drinking, desecration of Sundays and holidays, and slandering and mocking those inclined to do good.

Braun also described what he saw as the essential difference between the two factions:

> The Mennonite Church, in its practice, stands completely on the foundations of the territorial church (not theoretically, for according to [her] confession of faith and catechism she intends to be a "fellowship of believers," in actuality, however, she is consciously not one). In this regard theory and practice are far removed from one another; (*let's not try to fool ourselves about this.*) The Mennonite Brethren Church, on the other hand, defends the principle of a "fellowship of believers" (she wishes to accept only "true believers," thus also baptism upon a confession of faith). By asserting the above, I am not saying anything about the justification for the one or the other point of view; I am simply making an observation.[7]

The problem of decadence in the Mennonite Church, therefore, was complicated because in its confession of faith it was Anabaptist, but in its practice it had become a territorial church. And it defined itself practically, though not theoretically, as such. The gap between confession and practice in the Molotschna Mennonite Church was

similar to the gap between Augustine's Platonic ideal church—the archetypal church conceived in the mind of God—and its imperfect "shadow" here on earth; Platonists such as Augustine believed that the archetypal could never be fully replicated here on earth. Reformers, like the Anabaptists—and, in the Ukraine, like the Mennonite Brethren—were considered visionaries or fanatics (*Schwärmer).*

The Road to Separation

Pietism and the Gnadenfeld Church

The secessionists therefore had reason to complain about the moral condition of the Molotschna Mennonite Church. But what influenced them to take the actions they did? The answer appears to lie in the pervasive pietistic influence that Russian Mennonites had been exposed to in the past, and were again exposed to during the 1850s. Robert Friedmann, in his *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries,* argued that German pietism influenced the Mennonites virtually from its earliest inception in 1675, not only on the European continent, but also in America.[8] It should therefore not be a surprise that it did so also in the Ukraine.

In 1835 a Lutheran pietist congregation joined the trek from Prussia to the Molotschna colony and settled in the village of Gnadenfeld. Influenced by Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brethren, the congregation also maintained relationships with the two great German pietist mission schools that had been established after the French Revolution of 1789 in Basel, Switzerland, and Barmen, Germany.[9] Beginning in the late 1850s, virtually all of the Russian Mennonite Church ministers were educated in one or the other of these schools, but especially in the Barmen Mission School. It was from Friedrich Fabri, the principal of the Barmen school, that Elder Lenzmann of the Gnadenfeld Church received his misinterpretation of the Parable of the Tares. But, they also absorbed something else from Barmen: a renewed emphasis on conversion and on revival. This is an emphasis that came into pietism very early, indeed with Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* of 1609.[10]

Arndt was a mystically influenced Lutheran from Strasbourg, but he insisted that what was lacking in his church was the *conversion* of its members. He stated:

> As every seed produces fruit of a like nature, so the word of God must daily produce spiritual fruits in us. If we are to become new creatures by faith, we must live in accordance with the new birth. In a word, Adam must die, and Christ must live in us. It is not enough to know God's Word; one must also practice it in a living, active manner."[11]

This emphasis on conversion in the German Lutheran Church was re-emphasized by Philip Jakob Spener in his 1675 introduction to a second edition of Arndt's book, called *Pia Desideria*, which was repeatedly printed under a separate cover later.[12] In the larger Lutheran Church it led to the pietist movement, which encouraged earnest minded groups of believers to gather together on Sunday afternoons for Christian fellowship and spiritual nurture. These groups came to be called *collegia pietatis.*[13] Some of these pietist cells eventually became *Free* or *Believers* churches, like the Church of the Brethren founded by the German pietist Alexander Mack in 1708. In Württemberg (South Germany), a number of these pietist enclaves eventually formed "separatist" churches, the most famous being the *Brüdergemeinde* of Korntal, a suburb of Stuttgart.[14] In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars some of these Württemberg separatist churches moved to the Ukraine.

Eduard Wuest

In 1846 a young Lutheran pietist pastor from this Korntal *Brüdergemeinde* was sent to the separatist church in the Ukrainian village of Neuhoffnung. His name was Eduard Wuest. His very first sermon was a clarion call for renewal in the church. With Paul, he said, he had "resolved to know nothing while I am with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The results were immediate; revival broke out in his own church, and from there spread to the neighboring villages, coming eventually to the village of Gnadenfeld. And now the problem that had already repeatedly taken place elsewhere within the pietist movement began within the Gnadenfeld congregation: those who had been converted wanted to meet as a "fellowship of believers," wanted to have communion only among the "converted." They wanted to exclude the "tares" from the fellowship of the wheat. When this was not allowed by Elder Lenzmann, a number of the "brethren" led

by Johann Klassen left the Gnadenfeld congregation to establish their own "believers church."

The Mennonite colony political power brokers as well as the leading church elders—with the exception of those of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the Ohrloff congregation—objected to this, declaring the group to be a breakaway sect of the Mennonite Church. They argued that as a breakaway sect they should lose the privileges granted the Mennonites upon their entry to Russia in 1789. And when an "overly exuberant spirit" entered into the separatist circles, a spirit that had already manifested itself among Wuest's followers because of his extravagant emphasis on "free grace" (at least that is the explanation always given) and his lack of emphasis on discipleship, someone in the Mennonite leadership designated them as *Huepfer* (Jumpers).

Now, *Huepfer* was the German translation of a Russian name that had been given to a radical Orthodox sect known as the Klysti, to which Rasputin is reputed to have belonged. When they gathered, members of the group would dance (jump) until they fell from exhaustion. It was in such a state of unconscious exhaustion that it was believed the Holy Spirit came upon them. As a sect of the Orthodox Church, these Klysti had no rights whatsoever and were often persecuted by the Russian government. But the Mennonites, as a Protestant "confession," enjoyed religious liberty, with the exception that they were not to proselytize among the Russian Orthodox because that was the privilege of the Orthodox State Church. If the separatists' enemies could get the government to label the Mennonite Brethren a sect, not only would their Mennonite privileges be taken away, but they would also become an outlawed group within Russian society.

How should they resolve this dilemma? The early Mennonite Brethren sent Johann Klassen to St. Petersburg where, with the help of German Baptists well connected to high government officials, he gained access to officers in the Department of the Interior. These informed Klassen that a legal solution was possible. As long as they adhered to a Mennonite confession of faith, they could—with the government's approval—simply form an independent Mennonite congregation. Having asserted in their founding document that they were in agreement "with our dear Menno" in all aspects of their faith, they now chose the Russian Mennonite Confession of Faith, known as *The United Flemish, Frisian and High German Anabaptist/Mennonite Confession of Faith*, as their own. Although modified slightly over time, this confession contained the original Mennonite beliefs in essential

form. They were then recognized by the Ohrloff congregation and by the St. Petersburg government, and so came to be accepted—after much persecution by the established Mennonite Church—as a legitimate Mennonite congregation.

The Influences

Pietism

The more extensive influence of pietism among the Mennonites can be illustrated with a quote from Jung-Stilling (1740-1827), a Württemberg pietist, medical doctor and writer, whose book *Heimweh* was directly responsible for Klaus Epp's trek to Central Asia to meet Christ in 1880. In a short biographical sketch of Menno Simons he wrote:

> I found this information in a brief excerpt from Menno Simons' writings, which the pious and enlightened Mennonite preacher Johannes Deknatel (1689-1759), Mennonite minister in Amsterdam—well-known through his anointed sermons—published at the midpoint of last century.
>
> I would very much regret if any of the readers of this diary were to be upset that I should remember that pious Menno Simons with reverend and respectful love. For it is truly time to remove those outdated sectarian paper walls that have for so long hindered the unity of the Spirit and stood in the way of an all-encompassing brotherly love. The anxiety with which one searched for truth in the age of the Reformation, clinging overly tenaciously to the words, were the cause of the tragic conflict between Lutherans and the Reformed. Had one simply and in child-like fashion believed the mystery of the Lord's Supper and in the universal free grace without trying to explain every detail, the rupture would not have occurred; nor would a rupture with the Mennonites have happened had one considered that infant baptism is not commanded in the Bible, but was introduced gradually by the early Christians even though there were still many who were baptized as adults, even on their deathbeds, until the Church finally passed

> a law mandating the baptism of children in the first days after their birth. And this law was retained in the age of the Reformation. Yet one can easily recognize that infant baptism is not a particularly necessary (essential) article of faith. The fact that Mennonites generally do not have particularly well-educated preachers has not detracted from their religious instruction; for they are generally at least as well grounded in the truths of the faith as we Protestants. Every knowledgeable person will recognize that their simple yes and no is the equivalent of an oath; and as far as their military service goes, this would take care of itself if a state consisting only of Mennonites [as in the Ukraine on a small scale] had to protect itself.[15]

Why does Jung-Stilling reference Deknatel whose collection of Menno's works must have been widely read amongst the Mennonites, even Russian Mennonites? For at least two reasons: first, because Deknatel was a Mennonite pietist who had been converted to the "new way" by the bishop of the Moravians and successor to Zinzendorf, a man named Spangenberg. Second, because of his pietist conversion, when he brought out his selection of writings from Menno, he removed all those aspects that might offend pietists, leaving out especially Menno's important, but too dogmatic (from a pietist point of view), 1539 *Fundamentals of Christian Doctrine.* In effect, Deknatel transformed Menno into a pietist![16]

What does the quotation from Jung-Stilling tell us about pietism? First, pietists were interested in joining hands with like-minded "enlightened" believers across denominational lines, and hence de-emphasized denominational dogmatic distinctives. (Menno's *Fundamentboeck* would not have been welcomed by them.) As a result they brought into being, with Basel as the center, an international *Allianz* (Alliance) movement, a movement P. M. Friesen tried to introduce among the Ukrainian Mennonites to help bridge the gap between the contending parties. One can see this emphasis in the Jung-Stilling quotation. Were Mennonite Brethren influenced by this "undogmatic" form of Christianity?

Second, in the place of dogma or creed, there came an emphasis on "experiential" Christianity—upon a subjective and often emotional conversion. They spoke of a *Busskampf,* a wrestling toward faith that could take days, sometimes weeks, to run its course.[17] Wesley called it

an "experimental" Christianity. Very often, then, as in mysticism, the conversion "experience," rather than the Word of God, became the criterion of truth by which the experience should have been tested. In mysticism this manifested itself in a very strong tendency to "separate Word from Spirit," something that seems clearly to have happened in the early *Huepfer* movement.

Third, there is also a very strong eschatological moment in pietism, which stems from the writings of the Tübingen mathematician and theologian, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) who, on the basis of a mathematical calculation of the number of the Antichrist (666) predicted the return of Christ for 1836.[18] This led to an emphasis on the coming kingdom of God on earth, which they intended to build.[19] The church, as conceived by the Anabaptist/Mennonites was of little concern to them, as one can see from Jung-Stilling's comments.[20] That is one of the reasons why pietists could just as easily remain in their respective state or territorial churches, so long as they retained their pietist enclaves within them. They were, therefore, also uninterested in the separation of church and state, with some notable exceptions such as Friedrich Fabri.[21] One German scholar has called the pietist attitude toward the state its "Achilles heel." Together with their emphasis on the interiority of religion, this made pietists easily manipulated by the state; by and large they failed to recognize Caesar for who he really was. Indeed, the ruthless Bismarck was himself a pietist. Mennonite Brethren, influenced by American evangelicalism very often fall into the same camp today.

There are two other elements in pietism that are problematic. Friedrich Fabri, the head of the Barmen Missions School where a whole generation of Russian Mennonite young men studied, believed in what he called the *sensus communis,* a kind of divine spark within every person. This view derived, ultimately, from Plato and Proclus, that is, from non-Christian sources. It is a belief that even found its way into St. Augustine's *Confessions*. There the church father asserted that, because of this divine spark present even in the ancient pagans, he had discovered the essence of the first nine verses of the Gospel of John in the writings of the Platonists. The greatest Latin church father's assertion allowed Renaissance humanists to argue that these ancient pagans had come very close to an understanding of Christianity through reason alone. In line with this belief they called Plato "most holy," and said: "Saint Socrates, *ora pro nobis.*" German mystics, and pietists such as Friedrich Fabri, also utilized this argument, but to

explain what they called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." For Fabri, it was a convenient concept on which to base his mission's philosophy, for every person—even the religiously illiterate—had a basic instinct for religion, a divine spark within that led him/her naturally to God. Both of these concepts are beautifully illustrated in Johann Arndt's description of the conversion process. And his book, as I have already indicated, was to be found in many Mennonite homes including those of the early Mennonite Brethren.

A short quotation from Arndt's book that deals with conversion makes it apparent that every Mennonite who owned a copy had access to this mystical perspective. In Chapter VI of the third book in the German original, Arndt wrote:

> If, in the days of Elijah (I Kings 17:1 & 18:45), it did not rain for three years and six months, so that one could neither plough nor seed [the soil]; and if, after that, a gentle, sweet and nourishing rain fell refreshing the whole world, yet the human heart was not watered, remaining arid and dry; then one could truly speak of misfortune, even of God's displeasure, and cry blood-red tears. But those who have never sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit in the *abyss of their souls* [where the divine spark is lodged], who have remained without faith and love like arid, rocky soil, and who have never experienced the overwhelming consolation of the Holy Spirit, should, a thousand times more, shed hot and bloody tears.
>
> The fault, however, does not lie with God who has offered to pour out His Holy Spirit on all flesh, Joel 2:28; it lies with man, *for he has not prepared the abyss of his heart* [has not "weeded the garden of his soul" to allow the divine spark to come forth and unite with the Holy Spirit].[22]

In the above passage there is not one word about Christ, or of the Scriptures that speak of him. There is nothing about Luther's theology of the righteousness of God, of Christ as the *Deus Revelatus,* of his theology of the cross. Arndt does speak of a cross, but it is not the cross of Christ; it is rather the cross that the mystic has to bear as a means of becoming purified. Were Mennonites affected by this mystical theol-

ogy of conversion? Perhaps the "jumpers" were.[23] To what extent were the pietists affected by it?[24]

Lastly, according to Robert Friedmann, virtually all the literature that circulated in the Ukrainian Mennonite colonies was of pietist origin. Cornelius Krahn, in his article on pietism in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, refers to Robert Friedmann's work and states as follows:

> Friedmann...concludes that [Anabaptism and pietism] are substantially different, and that when pietism came into the Mennonite fold it at the very least blunted the essential thrust of Anabaptism as discipleship in conflict with the world, and at the most, substantially changed and redirected Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and piety from a sturdy movement to conquer the world by bringing men under the lordship of Christ into a subjective emotionalized search for inner peace and godliness which lost its readiness to defy the world for the sake of its understanding of the Gospel and the Christian ethic. Pietistic Mennonitism, he claims, was much more ready to accommodate itself to prevailing culture and abandon such characteristic Anabaptist teachings as non-resistance and nonconformity.[25]

Friedmann also maintained that when Bender and the Goshen people began to recognize the above they attempted, on the basis of a broad-ranging strategy to resurrect the history of the Anabaptist movement, to return the Old Mennonite Church to the basic theological principles of their Anabaptist forefathers. Is the pietistic element in Mennonite Brethren theology at least partially responsible for the relatively easy accommodation to North American evangelicalism?

To answer such questions one will need a much more thorough understanding of early Mennonite Brethren theology to discern precisely how that theology was influenced by pietism in general and Württemberg pietism in particular.

Menno Simons

If pietism played a powerful role in the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren Church, what role did Menno Simons play? In his Foreword to Jakob Bekker's *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church,*

Elmer Martens wrote, "The story needed to dispel a variety of popular misconceptions. For instance, the account demonstrates how secure are the roots of the Mennonite Brethren in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition."[26] Is this really the case? Or is it wishful thinking in the wake of Harold Bender's attempt at renewing the Anabaptist vision?

No doubt Bekker has offered a more comprehensive insight into the early use of Menno by Mennonite Brethren than any other writer. But what does Bekker say about Menno? He tells us that the early Brethren cited two of Menno's writings: Menno's *Exodus from the Roman Catholic Church*, and his *Foundations of Christian Doctrine*, usually referred to as the *Fundamentboek*. I have already noted from Deknatel's "pietistic" edition of Menno's works that the latter did not contain the *Fundamentboeck*. Therefore, they must have read it in another edition. In terms of Menno's theology, this is the most important of all of the Dutch reformer's works and was the most widely read in the sixteenth century. From it the Brethren could have derived a wholly adequate understanding of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology. The question, however, is: How did they read it? Was it to get a comprehensive understanding of Menno's theology or simply to proof text their positions over against those of their adversaries?

In their document of secession the writers state: "According to our convictions from the Holy Scriptures, we are in full accord with our beloved Menno Simons regarding the articles of the Confession of Faith."[27] Their starting point, therefore, was not Menno's theology, but the Confession of Faith. A little further on they state:

> Concerning the Lord's Supper, we confess that it serves... not as an emblem of fellowship of believers with unbelievers, as is being observed at present. Menno Simons confesses to this truth in the same manner in his basic *Fundamentals*, Vol. I, pages 115-121. On page 121, he states: "If someone errs in doctrine and faith and is carnally minded, he can in no wise be admitted along with the God-fearing, etc."[28]

With respect to the choosing of ministers, the early Brethren write, "Other ministers are chosen through the instrumentality of true believers as recorded in Acts 1; Menno Simons clearly recognized this in his *Fundamentals,* Vol. I, p. 148." In regards to the banning of all "carnally-minded and willful sinners," they state, "Menno Simons also

recognized and believed this with us, as is found in his *Fundamentals*, Vol. III, 334, 335." And they conclude with a kind of omnibus bow in Menno's direction: "In all other points of our confession, we are in full agreement with Menno Simons."[29]

Later on, when, in May/June of 1860, John Klassen brought a Baptist booklet back from St. Petersburg that recommended immersion baptism, Bekker allowed Klassen to convince him of the biblical nature of the practice. But that was what Baptists, not Mennonites did; this placed the Brethren in a difficult position. Bekker put it this way: "Because we had declared in our document of secession that we were in agreement with Menno Simons in all other points, I searched in his *Basic Fundamentals* for his statement on baptism to look for proof that he recognized baptism in water."[30] And they found a passage in Vol. I, on page 58, where Menno wrote that baptism had changed many times since the age of the apostles, but that the apostolic baptism had taken place in uninhibited water (*unbeschwertem Wasser).* This, Bekker argued, had to mean flowing water and that was sufficient ground "for me to defend immersion in court as a form of Mennonite baptism."[31]

What were these early brethren doing with Menno? They were taking the issues that divided them from the larger Mennonite Church and looking to confirm their positions with proof texts drawn from Menno's *Foundations of Christian Doctrine.* But the things they looked for had not only to do primarily with the outward forms of the faith including baptism, the ban, the nature of the church, but also with the confessional articles. There was nothing, however, concerning conversion; Menno's *Meditations on the 25th Psalm,* his *On the New Birth,* or *The Spiritual Resurrection,* are not so much as mentioned. It was in these writings that Menno wrote about his own conversion. The Brethren approach appears to demonstrate that they were not looking for an Anabaptist or Mennonite theology, but merely to discover whether Menno agreed with them on certain points. What theology they had was more than likely drawn from pietism.

The Baptists

The Baptist influence comes into play only about six months after the break with the old church; one must, therefore, stress that it had very little, if anything, to do with the cause of the rupture. Having said this, however, it is clear that the Mennonite Brethren received from the Baptist pamphlet Klassen brought back from St. Petersburg

in summer of 1860 not only immersion baptism, but also the belief that immersion baptism was the *only correct form of baptism to be tolerated.*[32] Because of this belief, they re-baptized everyone who desired to join their fellowship but had not been immersed. Abraham Unger from the village of Einlage in the Chortiza Colony, however, came much more directly under German Baptist influence, perhaps even before the break. In 1873 he produced the first Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. A slightly modified Hamburg, German Baptist confession, it contained all the Calvinistic theological formulations—another indication that the first Mennonite Brethren were theological novices.[33] Eventually, the Mennonite Brethren—more particularly P. M. Friesen—wrote an authentic Anabaptist/Mennonite Confession of Faith.[34] But one suspects that he wrote it, at least in part, because after 1873, when Unger had submitted his "Baptist" confession to the Russian government during the conscription controversy of 1873-74, the government thought Mennonite Brethren really were Baptists.[35] Given Unger's confession, they had good reason to think so. And if Mennonites really were Baptists, they should have their privileges taken away from them and declared a sect, especially since they were proselytizing amongst the Orthodox.

There were other connections. First, virtually all Mennonite Brethren who sought a higher theological education did so at the Hamburg-Horn German Baptist Seminary. Second, many Mennonite Brethren were very active, on a personal level, in the Ukrainian Baptist Church, with many historians arguing that they were its true founders. Johann Wieler in particular played a leading role among the Ukrainian Baptists.[36] In 1903, only one year after he had written the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith, P. M. Friesen wrote another for the Ukrainian Baptists. Perhaps the only reason these Baptists did not become Mennonite Brethren is that the government would never have allowed it. Furthermore, since they were by the nature of being Ukrainians, ineligible for "Mennonite privileges," it did not really matter whether they did or did not remain Baptists. And in any case, for Mennonite Brethren to admit that they were proselytizing among the Russian Orthodox would have been to admit to a criminal offense.

Ludwig Keller

What then did the Russian Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren included, know about Anabaptism in the early years of the movement?

In P. M. Friesen's 1902 Confession of Faith, in the article on baptism, one gets some sense of what lay at the heart of Anabaptist theology. There baptism is explained in terms of Christ's Great Commission as follows:

> All those who have heard the Gospel and accepted it with a contrite heart and living faith, are to be baptized in water (immersed) upon their confession of faith in accordance with the command of Christ: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).[37]

But Friesen did not stop with the great commission. Like the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, he then argued that the apostles had been careful to fulfill this commission, in effect suggesting that they interpreted Christ's commission through those passages in the Acts of the Apostles that dealt with baptism, first and foremost Peter's *Pentecost Sermon,* observing:

> The apostles assiduously carried out this command of the Lord; in so doing, many people became believers and were baptized, both men and women, as they did especially on that Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit was poured out in Jerusalem. Those who heard and accepted Peter's and the other apostles' sermons, allowed themselves to be baptized and added to the church, about three thousand souls (Acts 2, 8, 10, 16 & 19).[38]

This way of combining the great commission with the baptismal passages in Acts is to be found only in the writings of sixteenth-century's greatest biblical scholar, Desiderius Erasmus, and the early Anabaptists, and it lies at the heart of their theology.[39] Based on passages in Erasmus's paraphrases on Matthew (1522) and the Acts of the

Apostles (1524), this combination led to a unique interpretation that I cannot expand on here.[40] And it got into Friesen's confession at least in part because, in order to get the charge of being Baptists off their backs—a charge increasingly made by the Russian government itself in the 1890s—Friesen went back to early Mennonite confessions to prepare for the 1902 confession and "accidentally" picked it up. There is no evidence that he knew the theological import of what he had done.

To confirm the fact that all Ukrainian Mennonites, not only Mennonite Brethren, had little or no understanding of Anabaptist history and theology, consider the following. In 1897, just a few years before Friesen wrote the 1902 Confession, Ludwig Keller's interpretation of Anabaptist history and theology began to infiltrate the ranks of the Ukrainian Mennonites, both Mennonite Brethren and Old Mennonites.[41] On the Mennonite Brethren side it came through Heinrich J. Braun who, while a student at the Hamburg Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote Keller on November 22, 1897: "It is my goal, while in Germany, to learn as much as possible about the historical origins of the Mennonites."[42] In the same year David H. Epp, the leading historian and theologian for the larger Mennonite brotherhood, wrote as follows in a historical addendum to his *Kurze Erklärungen und Erläuterungen zum Katechismus der christlichen taufgesinnten Gemeinden, so Mennoniten genannt werden* of 1897:

> Concerning the inception of our church, and the time [and place] of its origin, many of us—and many others—are very much in the dark. Some contend that Mennonites are a Protestant, that is a Lutheran sect and that the cradle of Mennonitism was Prussia; others say we are of Catholic origin since Menno was originally a Catholic priest; still others accuse us of being "Anabaptists" and regard us, falsely, of being descendants of those fanatics and revolutionaries who, in the sixteenth-century Westphalian city of Münster, wrecked such havoc; and, finally, there are those who hold our church to be a branch of the English Baptists.[43]

These confessions of ignorance regarding Anabaptist origins and thought are important for understanding why, already in 1897 through David H. Epp on the Mennonite side and Heinrich J. Braun

on the Mennonite Brethren side, whatever interpretation of Anabaptism Russian Mennonites had was easily and quickly superseded by Ludwig Keller's interpretation, an interpretation that self-destructed after 1900, at least in Germany. It did not do so among the Ukrainian Mennonites, however, for reasons that I have laid out in my book, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State before and during World War I.* Mennonites clung to it because it became politically useful, especially after 1910. Only in one respect did they not accept Keller's interpretation, and that was in respect to Keller's Anabaptist hero.[44]

Keller, himself powerfully influenced by the German mystical tradition—probably through the good offices of pietism—chose Hans Denck, the Mystical Anabaptist, rather than Menno Simons as his hero, calling him the *Apostle of the Anabaptists* in his 1882 biography. Had the Ukrainian Mennonites—and, incidentally, also the Mennonite Brethren—accepted Denck rather than Menno as their hero, they would have had to renounce their repeated assertions of allegiance to Menno in their document of secession, and their own racial identity as Dutch Mennonites.[45] So they simply substituted Menno for Denck in Keller's scheme, but accepted everything else. And they did so at least in part because, at their inception, they imbibed a Lutheran rather than a mystical theology of conversion from Eduard Wuest.[46]

In any discussion of the intellectual influences on the early Mennonite Brethren, it should be pointed out that they uncritically exposed themselves to the Blankenburg Conferences in Germany in the nineteenth century, and fundamentalism and evangelicalism in the United States in the twentieth. If one takes all of these theological movements that have impacted Mennonite Brethren into consideration, sometimes more powerfully, sometimes less, one is nearly compelled to argue that Mennonite Brethren have never had a solid theological rudder to steer their theological ship. And if that is the case, the early Mennonite Brethren did not absorb any kind of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology from Menno's writings.

Are Mennonite Brethren still floundering around theologically? Many who have devoted a large part of their careers to the study of Anabaptist thought and history would, I think, be inclined to answer in the affirmative. From my perspective, it is high time this changed. It is high time that Mennonite Brethren develop a solid, comprehensive and Anabaptist theology. And if the justification for not doing so is a concern that Anabaptism was not "evangelical" or "evangelistic," it

is clear that the early Anabaptists were more evangelical than those who called themselves *die Evangelische Kirche* at the time of the Reformation and those who call themselves evangelicals today. The former remained a state (or territorial) church in the age of the Reformation, and its American derivatives have retained—even in a country where separation of church and state is the law—all the theological earmarks of the territorial church. From its inception the state or territorial church has given to Caesar the things that belong to God, and it continues to do so today, perhaps even more thoughtlessly than they have done in the past.

Endnotes

1 See Chapter I, "Erasmus, Reformers, and the Anabaptist 'Third Reformation,'" in *Radicals, Reformers, and Revolutionaries. The Context of Debate between Magisterial and Radical Reformers: 16th Century Radical Christianity* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2011), in press. The study is an expansion of the *Day-Higgenbotham Lectures* delivered at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in February 2008.

2 The perspective of the secessionists was necessarily limited to their context. There were individuals and even churches—like the Ohrloff congregation—to whom their accusation applied less or not at all.

3 For a comprehensive analysis of Augustine's interpretation, see Abraham Friesen, *Thomas Müntzer, a Destroyer of the Godless* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter III, "Augustine and the Parable of the Tares," 53-72.

4 Jacob Martens, *Mennonitische Blätter* 10, no. 4 (July 1863), 54.

5 For an extended discussion of the above issue, see Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State before and during World War I* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006), 58-60, 160-163, 182.

6 See John B. Toews, "Introduction," in *The Story of the Early Mennonite Brethren (1860-1869). Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 7.

7 Letter of November 16, 1932 from Peter J. Braun to his brother, Abraham Braun. In the possession of the author.

8 Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949).

9 A Mennonite, Gysbert van der Smissen of Danzig, carried on a lengthy correspondence with the founding inspector of the Basel Mission School, the famous Johann Christoph Blumhardt. The letters are held in the Basel Mission School's archives. Copies are in the possession of the author.

10 John Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. and ed. A. W. Boehm and Charles F. Schaeffer (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1868).
11 Arndt, *True Christianity*, 20. Arndt's book was to be found everywhere in Mennonite homes, even in the Ukraine.
12 Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. and ed. Theorodre G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).
13 In John Wesley's parallel movement in England they were called "holiness" groups.
14 There is still a *Bruedergemeinde* there today. Evangelical scholars maintain that the Mennonite Brethren *Bruedergemeinde* was named after this "mother" church. See Waldemar Gutsche, *Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1956), 34-36.
15 The brief Menno biography is contained in Jung-Stilling's *Taschenbuch für die Freunde des Christentums*, 1813.
16 See Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries*, 60-61; and the Deknatel entry in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II: 28-29.
17 See Andrew Dyck's chapter in this volume, which speaks of early Mennonite Brethren conversions in precisely the above terms, as a *Busskampf*.
18 See especially Gottfried Mälzer, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1970).
19 See especially Jörg Ohlemacher, *Das Reich Gottes in Deutschland Bauen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).
20 Jacob Mannhardt, who wrote the treatise *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten: Eine Geschichtliche Erörterung* (Marienburg, 1863) that defended the Prussian Mennonite's right to non-resistance within the kingdom, later on, in a series of articles in the *Mennonitische Blätter*, undermined that principle by arguing that non-resistance, derived from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, would only be legitimate in the future kingdom, to which Christ's sermon was directed, not to the current political age.
21 On Friedrich Fabri, see Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal in the Anabaptist /Mennonite Tradition* (Newton: Bethel College, 1994).
22 Arndt, *True Christianity*, chapter 4.
23 Is this why Arndt's book was later burned by the early MBs?
24 For a fuller treatment of this theology the reader may wish to turn to Chapter I of my *Thomas Müntzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, entitled, "John Tauler and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit,"10-32.
25 Cornelius Krahn, "Pietism," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV: 176-78.
26 Elmer Martens, "Foreword," in Jacob P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, trans. D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro: The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), vii.
27 Cited in Jacob P., Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, trans. D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), 44.
28 Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 44.
29 References to the Document of Secession are cited in Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 45, 46.
30 Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 180.
31 Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 180.

32 See Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, 158-160.
33 Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, 112-115.
34 Preliminary to writing the 1902 Confession, P. M. Friesen studied a number of Mennonite/Anabaptist confessions of faith and produced one of the best any Mennonite group has ever produced.
35 James Urry, in an e-mail to the author of September 22, 2010, argued that it was only at this point, when their "Mennonite privileges" were threatened, that Mennonite Brethren first began, consciously, to emphasize their "Mennonite" heritage.
36 See Johannes Dyck, "Moulding the Brotherhood: Johann Wieler (1839-1889) and the Communities of the Early Evangelicals in Russia" (M.A. thesis, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2007).
37 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Bruedergemeinde in Russland* (Halbstadt: Typographie P. Neufeld, 1902), 34-35 (author's translation).
38 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Bruedergemeinde in Russland*, 36 (author's translation).
39 I laid this out in considerable detail in Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). I have expanded on this book in a manuscript that has just gone to the publishers, entitled: *Reformers, Radicals, and Revolutionaries: Sixteenth-Century Radical Christianity in the Context of the Reformation Conflict.*
40 The reader is invited to judge for him/herself by reading the two books referred to in endnote #39.
41 On Ludwig Keller's interpretation of Anabaptism see Friesen, *History and Renewal*, especially chapters 3, 4, and 5.
42 Cited in Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, 54.
43 Cited in Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, 52.
44 See in the above regard especially the chapter on "Ludwig Keller, Hans Denck, and the German Mennonites," in Friesen, *History and Renewal*, 41-77.
45 Ukrainian Mennonites never called Menno the "founder" of their religion; they always referred to him as the "reformer" of the old Waldensian-led line of true Christians that reached all the way back to the Apostolic age.
46 See the chapter entitled "Through the Eyes of a Stranger," in Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, for a full description of Keller's influence on the Russian Mennonites.

Hymns of Phillip Friedrich Hiller in the History of Mennonite Brethren Hymnody

Larry Warkentin

I challenge anyone to describe music in Mennonite Brethren churches on a given Sunday in 2010. The variety is staggering. What instruments are used? What style of music is used? What theological ideas are emphasized? What languages are used? What is the role of hymnbooks or PowerPoint? The complexity is multiplied when the time frame is expanded over 150 years. It is like a forest in which tall trees compete with searching vines and emerging seedlings. How then can one hope to explore the history of Mennonite Brethren hymnody in a brief essay and not get lost in the forest of possibilities? I have chosen to follow a narrow path that is marked by several guideposts. The first guidepost is the religious renewal movement known as pietism, specifically Württemberg pietism, and the second is the devotional hymn texts of Phillip Friedrich Hiller, one of the leading exponents of Württemberg pietism. Both of these influences were evident at the birth of the Mennonite Brethren denomination and both have continued to shape Mennonite Brethren hymnody to the present.

Pietism is a multifaceted movement. It waxes and wanes from the seventeenth century to the present. Some scholars even suggest that pietist-like characteristics were present among Anabaptists during the sixteenth century.[1] Its identifying characteristics changed by location and era. Peter Letkemann reviews the differences between pietism around the turn of the eighteenth century and the later strain of pietism that came from the region of Württemberg in south-central Germany that affected the fledgling Mennonite Brethren Church in the first half of the nineteenth century.[2]

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) was a pietist from Württemberg who stressed the study of God's Word as a means to godly action. "Scripture teaches its own use, which consists in action. To act it, we must understand it...."[3] Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-

1782), another prominent Württemberg pietist, considered grace to be the means to righteousness. "Nothing can help the deep corruption, except the formation of grace. Therefore, one gives oneself immediately to grace with the desire to be led into all truth."[4]

Hans Kasdorf argued convincingly that pietism had a strong influence on early Mennonite Brethren spirituality. He suggested that pietism promotes a revitalized concept of fellowship, emphasizes conversion (the new birth), encourages a deepening of personal and corporate spiritual life, teaches disciplined Christian living through Bible study and prayer, and witnesses to the world.[5]

Dale Brown lists five central theological motifs of pietism. These include: Reformation of the church through Bible study, small devotional meetings and increased lay participation; an Emphasis on the Bible as the means to reform the church; Reformation of life with doctrine not as a goal but rather as a means to godly living; Theology not as theory but as experience that leads to regeneration through repentance, the new birth and conversion; and Hope for the transformation of the world through acts of love and mercy including missions, evangelism and education.[6] Many of these pietist concepts were transmitted to the German-speaking Mennonites of South Russia through German Baptist writers such as Johann Gerhard Oncken(1800-1884) and the German Baptist hymnal *Glaubensstimme.*[7]

The second guide along the narrow path in the forest of Mennonite Brethren hymnody is Philipp Friedrich Hiller (1699-1769), a pastor's son from Mühlhausen on the Enz. He received his master's degree in theology from the University of Tübingen and is recognized as the leading hymn writer of the Lutheran Württemberg Pietists.[8] He died nearly one hundred years before the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church, yet his hymns by their undeniable presence influenced the character of this group. One might debate whether Hiller's hymns shaped Mennonite Brethren views or reflected views they already held, but without question his hymns were present and appreciated in the early years of the denomination. In mid-career Hiller contracted a throat condition that ended his preaching ministry. Because he could no longer preach he decided to write devotional material. He published books of hymn texts in 1730, 1762 and 1767. The two volumes of 1762 and 1767 were bound together under the title *Geistliches Liederkästlein* (*Treasury of Spiritual Songs*). Each of the 732 hymns in this collection, one for each day in a two-year cycle, is

preceded by a relevant quotation from scripture and a brief devotional paragraph.

Hiller's concern for personal piety is clearly evident in the hymns found in the *Geistliches Liederkästlein*. More than 150 hymns use the personal pronoun *Ich* in the first line. More than 40 use *meine, mich,* or *mir* in the first line. According to the handbook of the Evangelical Lutheran hymnal "His hymns are Scriptural and plain. They breathe forth a depth of Christian experience. They offer guidance and comfort in the vicissitudes of life and are, therefore, probably best adapted for use for family devotions."[9]

A direct connection between Württemberg pietism and the South Russian Mennonites is found in the preaching of Eduard Wuest (1817-1859). "He maintained a warm relationship with 'Pietists,' the Moravian Brethren, and the Methodists."[10] P. M. Friesen devoted an entire chapter to the influence of Wuest on the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren Church.[11] Wuest spoke frequently in the Mennonite churches of the colonies. A strong emphasis on God's redeeming grace was a defining feature of his message.

Wuest loved singing and often included hymn texts in his sermons. His wife, who died in 1902, wrote to Rev. A. K. Kroeker concerning her husband's last days: "One or two days before his death I began, quite frankly with an anxious heart, to sing a verse from Hiller's *Schatzkästlein* at his bedside, because he loved singing so well:

> One may place his trust in grace
> (but I had hardly begun to sing when he quickly joined in
> quite strongly)
> One trusts it without remorse,
> And should dark fear o'ercome us,
> The words—God is true—remain!
> And should the grief grow greater,
> Still we believe and call aloud:
> Oh, thou mighty Savior,
> You come, then come indeed!"[12]

It should be noted that Wuest's wife was mistaken when she wrote of Hiller's *Schatzkästlein*. The book of that title is by Johannes Gossner (1830) and its title is actually *Schatzkästchen*. She obviously meant Hiller's *Liederkästlein* in which the hymn to which she refers is found. This text is a verse from Hiller's "*Die Gnade sei mit Allen*" ("God's

grace be with us all"). The opening line of this verse "one may place his trust in grace" is a clear example of the pietists' interest in the grace of God. Hiller's texts were planted in the South Russian Mennonite mind when Wuest introduced them at annual Mission Festivals held in Gnadenfeld in the early 1840s.

Wuest gets credit for introducing Hiller among the South Russian Mennonites, but it was Heinrich Franz whose musical influence kept his hymns alive. Franz was born in 1812 into a Mennonite family in the village of Horst, West Prussia and died in 1889 in South Russia. His early teaching career took place in Prussia where he absorbed a variety of influences that shaped his later work. One of his teachers was Friedrich Wilhelm Lange, a Lutheran who became a Mennonite and later an Elder of the Gnadenfeld congregation of which Franz was a member.[13] Franz arrived in South Russia in 1834. He began teaching in Gnadenfeld in September 1835 and continued there until 1844; in 1846 he was appointed to Chortitza and remained there until 1858, returning to Gnadenfeld in 1858. Toward the end of his career Franz taught in a private school on the Rosenhof-Brotski estate of Jacob Dyck. Heinrich Janzen, writing in 1927, remembered with fondness his study with Heinrich Franz on the Rosenhof estate.[14]

Singing in the Mennonite churches around 1850 has been described as "unison singing…(with) nasal, penetrating tone and the slow tempo made necessary by the many auxiliary notes between the main notes of the chorale."[15] It can be argued that the slow singing came first and the auxiliary notes evolved to fill the space. Nevertheless, the singing was slow and the melodies were embellished. Another account describes a Mennonite worship service in 1840: "Endlessly long hymns from the *Gesangbuch* were led by the *Vorsänger* of the worshipping congregation. These hymns were sung with so many flourishes and embellishments that the melody became distorted to the point of being unrecognizable."[16] This manner of singing was not unique to Mennonites. Educators throughout Europe lamented the quality of congregational singing in Protestant churches. The slow, elaborated singing associated with the Amish *Ausbund* is surviving evidence of this style.

Young people of every branch of the Mennonite family studied together in the village schools.[17] Thus, the influence of Franz's musical instruction was felt in the newly formed Mennonite Brethren Church as well as in the established congregations. Though music instruction was not a distinct class in these schools it was a significant part of

the religious instruction. Students memorized hymns and learned to copy the music of unison melodies and four-part hymn settings from Franz's manuscripts. His music was written in numerical notation called *Ziffern*.

Franz was an educator and desired to improve the quality of singing in the churches by introducing notation in place of the oral tradition that had been practiced for generations. Though the congregations may have been content with the quality of their singing, educators such as Franz apparently felt that it needed improvement. He suggests that this singing had lost much of its beauty, purity and correctness.[18]

In 1860, the same year eighteen families in Elisabethtal drafted a Document of Secession and formed the Mennonite Brethren Church, Franz's musical settings were published by Breitkopf and Härtel of Leipzig, Germany. In translation the title page reads as follows:

Chorale Book primarily for use in the
Mennonite schools of South Russia
edited by H. Franz Leipzig
published by Breitkopf and Härtel 1860
Part I
163 collected melodies for the songs in the
Mennonite Church Hymnal
Part II
112 selected melodies for church, school and home

The title page indicates that his music was "primarily for use in the Mennonite schools." In a culture that held its traditions tightly he realized that it would be expedient to begin with the youth rather than with the older generation. The first part of his book was correlated with the *Gesangbuch* of 1767, which was still in use by Mennonites. It contains no titles by Hiller even though the first collection of Hiller's hymns had been published in 1730.

In the second part of the book, which Franz describes as "selected melodies for church, school and home," he introduces four titles by Hiller. The four titles are "*Denk' ich an jene Himmels Chöre*" ("I think of yonder heaven's choir") "*Die Gnade sei mit allen*" ("God's grace be with everyone"), "*Ich will streben nach dem Leben*" ("I am striving for that life"), and "*Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren*" ("Mercy has been my experience"). Franz borrowed four-part settings of these hymns from the German Baptist *Glaubensstimme* rather than from Hiller's original

publication, which contained only hymn tune suggestions and no notation.

Wuest's preaching stirred latent desires for a more exuberant style of worship among some people in the Mennonite colonies. The newly formed Mennonite Brethren denomination found suitable musical expression for this new style in the hymns collected by Franz and in the Baptist *Glaubensstimme*. P. M. Friesen documents exuberant expressions of faith among some of the early Mennonite Brethren. He quotes a letter by Jacob Becker written from Rudnerweide on June 11, 1861:

> The Lord has done great things for us, for which we rejoice…Sunday we were so lively (in Jakob Reimer's home in Gnadenfeld) that the brethren leaped and danced, while we were near the water (where Jakob Reimer, the owner of the house, was baptized). And a little later we sang outside before the door, giving thanks and shouting for joy with one another.[19]

A few years later the church leaders tried to put a lid on this rambunctious crowd. At a conference in 1865 some guidelines were established including the following:

> The wild expressions of joy, such as dancing, were unanimously declared as not pleasing to the Lord; the drum (actually a tambourine) was not to be used any longer since it had caused much offense. Music that had been used in an unseemly, loud, and provocative manner was to be performed in a pleasing and harmonious manner instead. The joy in the Lord should not be prohibited, but everyone was to behave in a manner that edifies.[20]

A description of a worship service in 1861 names some of the sources used by the early Mennonite Brethren:

> The first song was accompanied with a harmonica and a violin, but not in a tumultuous manner. The hymns from the *Glaubensstimme*, Hiller's *Liederkästlein* and Gossner's *Schatzkästchen* were first read and then sung to the tunes printed in the *Melodien zur Glaubensstimme*…Their songs

> included: "*O der grossen Freude*" ("O the great joy"), "*Ehmals war ich nicht ein Kind*" ("Then I was not yet God's child"), "*Eines Wünsch ich mir vor allem Andern*" ("I have one wish above all others"), "*Auf ihr nah' verbundenen Jüngerherzen*" ("Your presence draws disciples' hearts together").[21]

The second song, "*Ehmals war ich nicht ein Kind,*" is by Hiller. His *Liederkästlein* was obviously in use as a source of hymn texts. The other hymnal mentioned in this 1861 description is *Glaubensstimme* (*Voice of Faith*). It became a primary source of hymnody for the Mennonite Brethren. This hymnal was published by the German Baptist company in Hamburg (later in Kassel). It went through numerous editions. Fifty-three thousand copies of the 1899 edition were printed. The editors, knowing that older editions were still in use, identified the hymns with both new and old numbers so that song leaders could avoid confusion in announcing the songs.[22] It contains thirteen hymn texts by Hiller. Among these titles are at least three that have endured in Mennonite Brethren experience: "*Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren,*" "*Ich will streben nach dem Leben,*" and "*Die Gnade sei mit allen.*"

I cannot resist a digression from the discussion of Hiller to mention a few other hymns in *Glaubenstimme* that are of interest to Mennonite Brethren. "*Was kann es Schönres geben*" ("What can be more lovely") by Karl Johann Philip Spitta became a favorite. And there are a few German translations of English and American gospel songs such as William Cowper's "There is a fountain filled with blood," and France Ridley Havergal's "Take my life and let it be consecrated," but the overwhelming number of texts are by German writers such as Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, Gerhard Tersteegen, Gustav Knak and Paul Gerhardt. A few texts are by Americans writing in the German language. Wilhelm Horn and Walter Rauschenbusch are among these writers. Horn will be mentioned later as the author of the perennial favorite, "*Nun ist sie erschienen*" ("Now has it appeared"), and Rauschenbusch later made an indelible impression with his translations of American and English gospel songs.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mennonite Brethren continued to publish hymnbooks in Russia and began to look for worship materials in America. *Heimatklänge* (*Heavenly Sounds*) crossed the ocean with the immigrants. The 1901 edition has no texts by Hiller. Perhaps the reason his work is not included is that *Heimatklänge* was often bound together with *Glaubensstimme,* which does include Hiller.

Several favorites make their appearance in *Heimatklänge*. Among these are "*Gott ist die Liebe*" ("God is Love," with 12 verses), "*Wir warten auf den Heiland bis er kommt*" ("We are waiting for the Savior 'til He comes"), "*Nimm, Jesu, meine Hände und färe mich*" ("Now Jesus take my hand and guide me"), and "*Müde bin ich, geh' zur Ruh*'" ("I am tired and go to rest"). Several of these deserve further comment. "*Gott is die Liebe*" was written by August Rische (1819-1906) and is often sung to a German folk tune. "*Wir warten auf den Heiland*" is sung to the American folk tune, "She'll be comin' round the mountain." This marriage of tune and text has not fared too well in North America because the silly folk song seems to demean the serious spiritual intent of the hymn text. "*Nimm, Jesu, meine Hände*" somehow became better known as "*So nimm denn meine Hände.*"

Often bound together with *Glaubensstimme* and *Heimatklänge* was a third collection named *Frohe Botschaft in Liedern* (*Gospel Message in Songs*). This compilation was a standard in Mennonite Brethren congregations on both sides of the ocean and became known as the *Dreiband*. This nickname is often translated as "trilogy," but that would imply that the three books make up some kind of interrelated whole. In fact, they are independent entities that happen to have a common binding. Perhaps "three-fold" would be more accurate, but the German title seems suitable without translation. *Frohe Botschaft* fully embraced the gospel song tradition. In it can be found German translations of "There is a fountain filled with blood," "Stand up, stand up for Jesus," "Nearer my God to Thee," "Whiter than snow," "What a friend we have in Jesus," and "O have you not heard of that beautiful stream." This last hymn, by Robert Torrey, Jr. (1865), was much loved in its German translation by Ernst H. Gebhardt (1832-1899), "*Ich weiss einen Strom.*"

Another triple-bound collection of hymns was published by Laner and Mattill in Cleveland, Ohio in 1889. This was the official publisher of materials for the *Evangelische Gemeinschaft* who later merged with the Methodists. The collection had three titles, *Hosianna, Jubeltöne,* and *Halleluja*. The third section includes "*Gott ist die Liebe*" by August Rische and the Christmas favorite, "*Nun ist sie erschienen*" by Wilhelm Horn, bishop of the Cleveland *Evangelische Gemeinschaft*.[23] Hiller is credited with only one hymn, "*Mein Alles, was ich liebe*" ("All that I love, all that I do, belongs to my Lord Jesus Christ").

One more German-language hymnal deserves mention in this history. In 1884 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren published an am-

bitious hymnal with 745 hymn texts. This group traced its beginning to 1869 in the Crimea. Their hymnal entitled *Die geistreiche Lieder-Auswahl* (*Spirit-Filled Song Collection*) leaned much more heavily on the German chorale tradition than did the *Dreiband*. Most significant for this study are three hymns by Philipp Friedrich Hiller: "*Mir ist Erbarmung*," "*Wie Simeon verschieden*" ("How Simeon departed is often on my mind") and "*Denk ich an jene Himmels Chöre.*" In 1960 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren merged with the Mennonite Brethren making their hymnal a part of this history.

As Mennonite Brethren congregations in the United States became increasingly acculturated to the American scene it was common for the pew racks to hold both English and German hymnals. The German hymnal was often *Evangeliums-Lieder* (*Gospel Songs*) number 1 and 2 copyrighted 1897 by The Biglow and Main Company of Chicago. The president of this company was Ira D. Sankey who was the most renowned gospel musician of the era. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), an American-born Baptist minister with good command of the German language, worked with Sankey in creating this hymnal. He translated many of Sankey's songs and numerous other hymns of the late nineteenth century into German. The overwhelming number of hymns in this book are English and American gospel songs translated into German. However, there are a few that originated in Germany. Hiller is represented by "*Jesus Christus herrscht als König*" ("Jesus Christ rules as King"), "*Mir ist Erbarmung, Ich will streben*," and "*Die Gnade sei mit allen.*"

The English hymnal often sharing the pew rack with *Evangeliums-Lieder* was *Tabernacle Hymns Number 3*, with a copyright of 1929. This publication is thoroughly American. Hiller is not included.

At the end of the Second World War, Mennonite Brethren in the United States began to talk about creating their own English-language hymnal. Herbert Richert became the primary editor. The book was finally ready for use in 1953. The preponderance of hymns are of the American gospel song type. Paul Wohlgemuth, in his dissertation on Mennonite hymnody, identifies 294 texts from America and 56 from England.[24] Thus, 350 of the 424 hymns in the book derive from the English-speaking world. Thirty-four hymns come from Germany. Not one hymn by Hiller can be found. This may be due to the fact that *Evangeliums-Lieder* was still available in the pews. A second reason is that a German language hymnal was simultaneously and independently being prepared in Canada.

The English translations in the 1953 hymnal include the following traditional Mennonite Brethren German favorites: "Now take my hand, O Father" (*So nimm denn meine Hände),* "Ne're a Soul did Perish" (*Keiner wird zu Schanden*), "I know of a River" (English original but much loved in German "*Ich weiss einen strom*), "The Sun has now Risen" (*Nun ist sie erschienen*, German original by an American author), God's love is boundless" (*Gott ist die Liebe*), "Come hither ye children" (*Ihr Kinderlein kommet*), "God calling yet" (*Gott rufet noch* by Gerhard Tersteegen), "My Jesus, as Thou wilt" *(Mein Jesu, wie du willst* by Benjamin Schmolck, 1672-1737), and "Jesus, still lead on" (*Jesu! geh voran* by Zinzendorf 1700-1760).

Wohlgemuth observes that "This hymnal, their first publication in the English language, will no doubt serve as a good steppingstone to the use of better hymn tunes in the Mennonite Brethren Church."[25] Two decades later Wohlgemuth was called on to put this critical observation to the test. He became the editor of the 1971 *Worship Hymnal* produced by the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches which will be considered later in this essay.

In Canada, where many German speaking Mennonite Brethren arrived after 1920, there was greater interest in creating a German language hymnbook. In 1952 the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* was completed. It contains 555 hymns and shares only 97 authors with its English language neighbor. It includes nine texts by Hiller, three of which were inherited from *Glaubensstimme*: *Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren*, *Ich will streben nach dem Leben,* and *Die Gnade sei mit allen*.

The *Worship Hymnal* of 1971 was a joint effort of Canadian and United States Mennonite Brethren churches. The project was approved at the 1966 General Conference in Corn, Oklahoma. "To accomplish the task a Hymnal Committee of two church musicians and one theologian from each of the two area conferences was selected."[26] Faculty members of the music departments from three Mennonite Brethren colleges were among the musicians appointed. Paul Wohlgemuth was selected as chairman-editor.

In Wohlgemuth's introduction to the hymnal he outlines the characteristics that give the hymnal its unique denominational flavor: the Gospel call, Christian evangelism, missions, service, Christian nurture, social concern, authority of Scripture, and music for youth. If the characteristics outlined by Wohlgemuth, (presented below in bold

print) are compared with the five characteristics of pietism listed by Dale Brown earlier in this essay, it is possible to see many parallels.

Christian nurture	Reformation of the church through Bible study, small devotional meetings and increased lay participation.
Authority of Scripture	Emphasis on the Bible as the means to reform the church.
Christian nurture	Reformation of life with doctrine not as a goal but rather as a means to godly living.
The Gospel call and Christian evangelism	Theology not as theory but as experience that leads to regeneration through repentance, the new birth and conversion.

Some of these characteristics can be traced to those introduced into Mennonite life in Russia by evangelist Eduard Wuest and to the hymns of Philipp Friedrich Hiller. Obviously, these characteristics are also found among other Christian groups, but their emphasis among Mennonite Brethren over the past 150 years is uniquely evident.

In their desire to reflect the denominational characteristics mentioned above it is not surprising that Wohlgemuth and his coworkers turned to Hiller for hymns. Six of his texts are included: "All my sins have been forgiven" ("*Schuld und Strafe sind erlassen*" translated by Esther Bergen), "What mercy and divine compassion" (a rather free translation of "*Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren*" by Frieda Kaufmann), "O blessed faith in God" ("*Bis an mein Ende hin*" translated by Ed Unrau), "Oh, grant me now Thy spirit's presence" ("*Gott! gib mir Deinen Geist zum Beten*" translated by Esther Bergen), "Striving onward, pressing forward" ("*Ich will streben nach dem Leben*" translated by Julius Horstmann), and "The grace of God be with us" ("*Die Gnade sei mit allen*" translated by Esther Bergen). Four of these six hymns come from the *Dreiband*. Three of them can be found in *Evangeliums-Lieder*.

In 1988 the Mennonite Brethren General Conference initiated work on a new Mennonite Brethren hymnal. A bi-national commit-

tee of church musicians, three women and four men, worked for seven years to select material that reflects the "diverse music and worship styles among fellow-believers."[27] The finished product, which became available in 1995, included only one hymn by Hiller: "The grace of God be with us" ("*Die Gnade sei mit allen*" translated by Esther Bergen). This hymn was on the lips of Eduard Wuest when he died in 1859. It represents the constant presence of pietism among Mennonite Brethren from 1860 until the present.

At the same time that the 1995 hymnal was being created another Mennonite Brethren hymnal entitled, *Glaubenslieder* (*Songs of Faith*) was being created in Frankenthal, Germany. This fascinating book is a time capsule of Mennonite Brethren faith. The congregation that created the book existed in virtual exile in Karaganda, Kazakhstan until they were permitted to emigrate to Germany after 1970. Printed in 1994, this book is notated in *Ziffern*, the same numerical system used by Heinrich Franz in his *Choralbuch* of 1860. The Preface states that they drew their selections from *Glaubensstimme, Zionslieder, Frohe Botschaft, Heimatklänge* and other sources. Hiller is represented by "*Die Gnade sei mit allen, Bis an mein ende*" ("Until my life ends"), "*Lehr mich, Herr, die Worte wägen*" ("Teach me Lord to weigh the Word"), "*Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren, Ich will streben,*" and "*Nun, hierzu sage Amen*" ("Now we say, Amen").

The Frankenthal hymnal is a reminder that the history of Mennonite Brethren hymnody is not a single path. This essay has only followed the presence of a single writer, Philipp Friedrich Hiller, from the beginning of Mennonite Brethren hymnody to the present. I have only explored the Russian-European-North American path in a forest of possibilities. South America adds yet another path. Mennonite Brethren in Africa, India, Japan and around the globe add other crossroads that lead to different musical destinations.

Music is a means of worship, not the end of worship. It is not unison singing or four-part harmony, not organs and pianos or drums and guitars, not stately chorales or syncopated songs, not unaccompanied hymns or electronic amplified bands, not historic favorites or current lyrics that give purpose to our worship. Scripture admonishes Christians to worship God in spirit and truth; with the spirit and with understanding. True praise to God must involve both heart and head, both emotion and intellect. When a Christian group becomes too attached to a particular style of music or a particular pattern of worship they run the risk of worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

The Mennonite Brethren in North America may be entering an era when printed hymnals are replaced by PowerPoint projections. Will there ever be a need for another printed book of hymns for Mennonite Brethren? The next Mennonite Brethren hymnal may be a CD with five thousand hymns and songs that are transmitted to LED screens at individual pews. Each generation needs to grow where it is planted, but each generation must test its message by the standard of God's Word. The Mennonite Brethren have a faithful history strengthened through singing, and it must never be forgotten. They must also seek a faithful future in which challenges yet unimagined will be ameliorated through song. Hiller provides a suitable admonition in his hymn based on Philippians 3:14:

> Striving onward, pressing forward, life and peace to gain,
> I will ever make endeavor until I attain;
> What detains I'll cast aside, by this promise to abide;
> Who endureth, life secureth, and the prize shall gain.

Endnotes

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18 Heinrich Franz, *Choralbuch, Zunächst zum Gebrauch in den mennonitischen Schulen Südrusslands* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1860), iii.
19 *The Mennonite Brotherhood,* 266.
20 *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 276.
21 "Hymnody," 224 (translated and quoted from *Mennonitische Blätter* X [1863], 15-16).
22 *Glaubensstimme für die Gemeinden des Herrn*, 4th edition (Kassel: Baptistische Verlags-buchhandlung, 1899), Preface.
23 Larry Warkentin, "The Sun Has Now Risen," *The Christian Leader*, December 14, 1982, 4-6.
24 Paul Wohlgemuth, "Mennonite hymnals published in the English language" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1956), 318-337.
25 "Mennonite Hymnals," 337.
26 *Worship Hymnal* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1971), Introduction.
27 *Worship Together* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1995), ii.

Passing on Peace? Canadian Mennonite Brethren and Peacemaking

Jonathan Janzen

The 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith declares that Mennonite Brethren are "to be peacemakers in all situations."[1] Indeed, as Abe Dueck notes, throughout their history there has been "strong concern evident among MBs for a positive witness in society at all levels."[2] For example, when it comes to the question of military involvement, Canadian Mennonite Brethren Confessions have repeatedly taken a **pacifist** stance. That is, they have insisted that eligible Mennonite Brethren not take up arms and instead, choose alternative service during times of war.[3] Canadian Mennonite Brethren have also affirmed a social activist approach that promotes justice and the reconciliation of relationships as an integral part of peacemaking.[4] Furthermore, Canadian Mennonite Brethren have frequently called one another to be peacemakers—"agents of reconciliation"—at the interpersonal level.[5]

Although there are countless Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have worked diligently to promote peace locally, nationally and globally, as church volunteers, conscientious objectors, doctors, employers, hockey coaches, lawyers, mediators, parents, police officers, politicians, social workers, teachers and so on, there have also been Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have viewed peacemaking as optional—an element that is not core to Christian discipleship.[6] For example, when it comes to **pacifism,** there were Canadian Mennonite Brethren who voluntarily enlisted in the military and saw active duty in World War II.[7] By the 1970s, only 65% of Canadian Mennonite Brethren agreed that the Christian "should take no part in war or war-promoting activities."[8] As a result, in 1981 a General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution stated, "We are concerned that a goodly number of our church members (including some pastors) view our position on 'love and nonresistance' as an optional doctrine."[9]

Or consider peacemaking in a social activist sense. In 1972 J. A. Toews noted that some Canadian Mennonite Brethren "would like to restrict our concerns to evangelism and missions in the traditional sense...[and] look with suspicion upon cooperation in MCC [Mennonite Central Committee]."[10] John Redekop routinely chided Canadian Mennonite Brethren for an attitude of non-involvement. To those who criticized the work of MCC and declared, "Let's win souls and quit exporting plows and chickens," Redekop insisted that words without actions indicated spiritual anemia.[11] To those who suggested that Mennonite Brethren should not be distracted with soup kitchens, immigration assistance or First Nations land claims, Redekop replied, "Helping people who need help is as much a part of the true gospel as of the social gospel."[12]

Meanwhile, there are Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have not been peacemakers at the congregational or interpersonal levels. At times, Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church communities have failed to be places where healthy and creative conflict leads to reconciling love and forgiveness.[13] As Katie Funk Wiebe once observed, Mennonite Brethren are not known for their "skill in making peace between individuals and small cliques fighting with the weapons of position, rhetoric, gossip, and money."[14]

Why is this? Why have Canadian Mennonite Brethren not been more consistent in practicing their ideals surrounding peacemaking? Why have many Canadian Mennonite Brethren tended, at times, to pass on peacemaking? Aside from the fact that they are human—fallen, fragile and fearful people who avoid discomfort as much as possible, I will identify at least six factors that have at times fostered a sense of ambivalence and inconsistency when it comes to peacemaking. Confusing terms and definitions, Canadian culture's support for peacekeeping and social security, individualism, Mennonite Brethren conference missions structures, theological orientations towards pietism, fundamentalism and nonconformity, and lack of training have undermined a comprehensive and tenacious Canadian Mennonite Brethren peace witness.

Definitions

Before proceeding, however, it is best to pause and define more carefully the terms that will be used in this discussion of Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking.

Peace: Peace is understood to be more than the absence of war, conflict and violence. As the 1999 Confession of Faith explains, peace includes a reconciled relationship with God and with others. It encompasses the qualities of righteousness and justice, faithfulness and steadfast loving kindness, grace, blessing and wholeness. Peace is therefore both a goal and a way of being. The biblical word *shalom* is commonly used to capture this robust fully-orbed sense of peace.[15]

Pacifism: This term has been used to cover many varieties of peacemaking, not all of which are Christian in orientation. For example, some people without any particular religious commitment embrace pacifism and see the absence of war, conflict and violence as an end in itself, whereas numerous Christians embrace pacifism out of obedience to Christ, and see an encounter with Jesus as the end, with *shalom* an outcome.[16] Pacifism has sometimes been used as a synonym for peacemaking.[17] Pacifism will be used here to describe the rejection of military force to maintain or bring about *shalom*. In this chapter, pacifism does not mean that one rejects the use of all force. Furthermore, pacifism does not equal passivism, even though it will be argued that Canadian Mennonite Brethren pacifism has occasionally led to a passive disregard for social justice.[18]

Nonresistance: There is a long legacy of identifying the Canadian Mennonite Brethren understanding of peacemaking with the term nonresistance. For example, those who actively pursue peace and justice might describe themselves as "nonresistant."[19] Indeed, nonresistance is the label given to the current Confessional article on peacemaking. The meaning of nonresistance has frequently been equated with nonviolence and pacifism.[20] Nonresistance gradually came to mean a more passive posture that rejects all force and coercion in all areas of life, so that one is to "turn the other cheek" regardless of personal or social consequences.[21]

Violence: This term describes the violation or destruction of the dignity or integrity of a person. Violence is, therefore, not restricted to physical or bodily harm. It can include an attack on a person's emotional, spiritual or psychological wellbeing. It can also include the omission of acts necessary for life. Furthermore, violence can be direct or indirect, planned or inadvertent. Individuals, institutions and social structures can commit violence. At least three assumptions are present in this definition of violence. First, it distinguishes between the violation of a person and acts of disruption, destruction of property and violation of laws. Second, it indicates that coercion and force are not

necessarily violence.[22] Third, it holds that all violence is not "equally bad." For example, one may heal from a broken arm, but one does not recover from death; one may recover from the financial losses suffered as a result of a boycott, but one may never recover confidence from the verbal abuse of one's employer.[23]

Nonviolence: Not surprisingly, this term indicates the opposite of violence. One can exercise power, be persuasive, apply pressure or use force without inflicting injury or damage on others. Nonviolence thus characterizes actions used by pacifists and non-pacifists to try to affect the actions of others without violating their dignity or integrity.[24]

Persuasion, Coercion and Force: Force is commonly understood as the use of power to effect change of some kind and often serves as an umbrella term for an assortment of persuasive and coercive actions, be they physical, verbal or otherwise. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the term force is used in a more specific way. At one end of the spectrum continuum, persuasion is used to describe actions that try to affect the behavior of another "without denying their freedom to accept or reject a point of view."[25] One might persuade another with argument, or through self-inflicted suffering (for example, hunger strikes). Coercion falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Coercion refers to pressure put on someone to act or think in a certain way because of likely sanctions. Forms of coercion include political action (for example, voting, lobbying), indirect action (for example, strikes, boycotts), as well as disapproval or ostracism. Coercion thus goes beyond persuasion because the costs to the person who is not reconciled are clear. For instance, a politician is aware that she may lose votes if she chooses to flout the wishes of her constituency.[26] Force denotes actions that physically restrict people from continuing to do what they have been doing, or make them do something that they would not otherwise do. This would include, for example, the physical prevention of suicide or criminal acts, or the use of drugs that make it impossible for a person to behave any other way, which might at times result in violence (that is, injury). Force thus lies at the opposite end of the continuum in relation to persuasion. Acts of persuasion, coercion and force, understood in these ways, can be violent, but may also be nonviolent. The key issue for developing a Mennonite Brethren understanding of peacemaking is whether the acts violate the integrity of the other person.[27]

Peace Position, Peace Witness, Peacemaking, Peace Theology and Reconciliation: There has been discomfort among some Ana-

baptist-Mennonite writers about the term "peace position." Rather than giving the sense of something being actively pursued in peaceful ways, peace position suggests that peace is something already achieved. Consequently, the term peace witness has gained traction because it suggests that peace is not a position to be defended, but "something you do on the move."[28] At the same time, however, many frequently use peace position and peace witness interchangeably as code words for specific peacemaking strategies such as pacifism or nonresistance.[29] Canadian Mennonite Brethren in particular have described their peace witness as pursuing reconciliation through the "limitless love of enemies."[30]

To confuse matters further, peace witness is often understood in more general terms. Like peacemaking, peace witness refers to an attempt to achieve peace to some degree. For example, someone who facilitates conflict resolution between two parties is a peacemaker. His peace witness was serving as a mediator. Similarly, a conscientious objector is a peacemaker. Her peace witness is refusing to go to war.

For the purposes of this chapter, peace position and peace witness do not refer to a particular approach to peacemaking. Rather, the phrases peace position, peace witness, and peacemaking are understood in the sense of a broader discipline like peace theology. The word "theology" refers to the study of God, the living of life in the light of God's revelation and the ongoing process of articulating and revising one's understanding (be they doctrine or dogma).[31] Peace theology is the God-centered study of peace, the living of life in the light of God's peace, and the ongoing process of articulating, implementing and revising one's understanding and approach to peace. Peace theology pursues both good thinking and good action, or activism, for the sake of peace.[32]

In sum, peace position, peace witness, peacemaking and peace theology are used interchangeably. They refer to the Mennonite Brethren's philosophical and theological beliefs, attitudes, habits and practices concerning peace. The terms encompass the ways in which Canadian Mennonite Brethren have reflected on and worked towards peace.

Peacemaking, therefore, is not limited to pacifism. Peacemaking includes social activism that leverages power in persuasive, coercive and forceful ways to seek justice—"to alleviate human suffering and misery in the world."[33] Peacemaking also involves efforts at motivating and facilitating repentance, forgiveness and compassionate love so that people might be reconciled with God and with one another. Accord-

ingly, peacemaking is an endeavor that is both political and spiritual, public and personal, communal and individual in nature.[34]

Confusing Terms and Definitions

With the above definitions in mind, it is perhaps easier to observe how the first factor, lack of clarity regarding definitions, has undermined Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking. As already noted, up until the 1960s Mennonite Brethren tended to use the term nonresistance to describe their peace witness. More specifically, nonresistance typically denoted a pacifist position that refused to bear arms (yet was willing to offer alternative service in the form of medical care and relief services).[35] Matters got confusing as some Canadian Mennonite Brethren insisted that nonresistance went beyond pacifism to include passivism—the rejection of all persuasion, coercion and force in all areas of life, and willingness to forsake self-defense and suffer violence and injustice.[36] To complicate things all the more, beginning in the 1960s some Canadian Mennonite Brethren worked to redefine nonresistance. Nonresistance was said to communicate an active posture that would overcome evil through evangelism, and by deeds of kindness and suffering love.[37]

Exacerbating the situation even further has been the tendency to rely on unrealistic scenarios when discussing peacemaking. For example, there are Mennonite Brethren writers who suggest that one must choose between "vengeance" (or retaliation or retribution) and peace;[38] one must decide to kill or to love;[39] one must choose between force or God.[40] Yet most Canadian Mennonite Brethren deal in situations in which the options are much less polarized. The typical mother who disciplines her son does not have vengeance in mind. The elder team that encourages a church member to reconsider her choice to marry a non-Christian has no desire to kill her if she disregards the counsel.[41]

In sum, because Canadian Mennonite Brethren have tended to advocate peacemaking on the basis of nebulous concepts and unrealistic scenarios, they have (unfortunately) undermined the integrity of their own arguments. For some Canadian Mennonite Brethren, the notion of peacemaking as nonresistance has at times encouraged non-involvement—they simply assume that nonresistance means that one does not challenge wrongdoing.[42] Other Canadian Mennonite Brethren have assumed peacemaking is passé because they are unconvinced that the rejection of all force is the "biblically mandated Christian re-

sponse."[43] After all, not all persuasion or coercion is violent. Nor does nonresistance fully conform with Scripture: Romans 12 and 13 seem to encourage submission to and involvement in government, plus Jesus himself confronted injustice using force. Still others have hesitated to embrace peacemaking "loaded up" with social justice concerns because they have associated it with political ideologies (for example, communism) or humanistic philosophies (for example, rationalism).[44]

Canadian Cultural Values: Peacekeeping and Social Security

Another factor that has undermined Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking is Canadian culture itself, which values peacekeeping and publicly funded social support services. Dalton Reimer has noted that war "as a powerful foreground issue, came to dominate the meaning of peace," so that even as late as 1986, a Mennonite Brethren publication such as *The Power of the Lamb* was "weighted heavily towards peace as a response to war."[45] When it comes to war and military involvement, however, the Canadian context has been friendly to those holding pacifist views. Up until recently, Canada had not been involved in any major conflict for roughly fifty years, and when Canada has deployed its military, it has routinely done so as a peacekeeping force. The upshot is that the Canadian Mennonite Brethren mandate to select alternative service during times of war has gone unchallenged for half a century, so that there has been little motivation to discuss or teach peacemaking. To put it bluntly, peacemaking has been neglected because many Canadian Mennonite Brethren have not been forced to decide whether they will be pacifist or not.[46]

When it comes to social activism, some Canadian Mennonite Brethren have sometimes assumed that they "have no poor people" in their churches.[47] This perception is partly due to the fact that many Canadian Mennonite Brethren originally settled in rural communities, where poverty was perhaps less noticeable, or may have been considered a "city problem." In addition to this simple lack of awareness, the Canadian government's social welfare safety net seems to have encouraged a sense of indifference among some Mennonite Brethren. Public assistance meant that some Canadian Mennonite Brethren did not feel a sense of urgency to engage in peacemaking for the sake of social justice. Canadian culture thus made it easier for some to think that the church was not responsible for the poor in their local communities.[48]

Individualism[49]

It is unclear to what degree individualism among Mennonite Brethren has been the outcome of specific denominational organizational patterns and theological orientations. Vice versa, it is not entirely certain to what extent the individualism that characterizes Canadian culture has motivated and shaped Canadian Mennonite Brethren church structures and convictions. Nevertheless, individualism—having the ability and freedom to make one's own choices—is an additional factor that has hampered Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking.

In an individualistic culture, spirituality is privatized. People think that religion is simply a personal matter. Moreover, religion becomes a consumer product. One simply picks this or that aspect of a religion that one deems useful and feels free to discard the rest. This do-it-yourself approach to religious faith means that people tend to embrace only that which appeals to their tastes.[50] Because individualistic consumers move on when they no longer enjoy what they want, it becomes increasingly difficult for churches to expect certain behaviors of their members.

Many Canadian Mennonite Brethren have been influenced by this broader cultural ethos in at least two ways. On one level, a cohesive approach to peacemaking has been difficult to achieve because Mennonite Brethren have consistently granted local congregations decision-making autonomy.[51] Consequently, churches have been free to pursue those aspects of peacemaking they deem appropriate, or they may simply ignore peacemaking altogether. Congregational individualism, so to speak, has thus undermined a unified approach to peacemaking at the provincial or national stage.

On another level, Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregations have granted individuals decision-making autonomy as well. With a desire to be attractive in a culture where the "customer is king," and "brand loyalty" is ever more scarce, Canadian Mennonite Brethren have become increasingly hesitant to expect certain behaviors of their members.[52] Indeed, some Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregations do not make an affirmation of peacemaking a prerequisite for church membership.[53] The upshot is that Canadian Mennonite Brethren pastors and congregations can, to the best of their ability, call people to affirm various aspects of peacemaking, but the individual has the final choice. As one letter to the editor of the *Mennonite Brethren*

Herald recently stated, "My church gives great guidance in the area of values/ethics, but what I choose to do with the information and examples set by our church leaders is totally between me and God."[54] Again, individualism encourages the view that peacemaking is superfluous.

Mennonite Brethren Conference Missions Structures

The organization of church conference structures seems to have been a third factor that has hindered a robust Canadian Mennonite Brethren peace witness. In particular, the ways in which Canadian Mennonite Brethren pursued missions at home and abroad encouraged the impression that certain peacemaking tasks, such as gospel proclamation, were more important than other tasks, such as feeding the poor and defending the oppressed.

For example, in 1966 the Board of Welfare and Public Relations—whose responsibilities included promoting the Mennonite Brethren peace position and equipping Mennonite Brethren for social activism, was merged with the Board of Missions—whose primary task was to promote and equip Mennonite Brethren for foreign mission work.[55] Unfortunately, this made it easier for Canadian Mennonite Brethren to focus solely on foreign missions and ignore the needs of those closer to home. While many Canadian Mennonite Brethren individuals and churches pursued relief, development and social services in partnership with agencies such as MCC, Canadian Mennonite Brethren also chose to set up their own separate conference structures to work at church planting.[56]

Overall, for reasons that are not altogether bad, Canadian Mennonite Brethren developed structures that made it that much easier for some Canadian Mennonite Brethren to prioritize evangelism and "offload" social justice concerns. In some instances, it became easy to assume that poverty and injustice were issues to be dealt with in another community or another country.[57] In other cases, it became easier to think that peacemaking was irrelevant simply because the structures did not raise the issue. As Peter Kroeker observed, even the name "Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services" supported the impression that mission, that is, proclamation, was "of greater urgency or of higher value" than service, that is, seeking justice, so that if there were not enough resources to accomplish everything, then the task with the lower priority could be left undone.[58]

Theological Orientations: Pietism, Fundamentalism, Nonconformity

Certain theological orientations are another factor in limiting Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking. Canadian Mennonite Brethren have frequently insisted that the church is a fellowship of redeemed, separated people, controlled by redemptive love. The thinking has been that a community of love and reconciliation is a peace witness; it is a sign to the world of God's kingdom. Being a community that lives by the law of love and practices forgiveness is itself evangelistic.[59]

Yet, as explained earlier, this sense of community peacemaking has often been undercut by the individualistic impulse within Canadian culture. A theological inclination internal to Canadian Mennonite Brethren has also encouraged an individualistic leaning. In particular, Mennonite Brethren roots in pietism have motivated an emphasis on personal conversion, but pietism has also led some Mennonite Brethren to be overly focused on "the inward experience of God's grace" while ignoring "its outward application to all areas of life."[60] A de-emphasis on peacemaking has been further encouraged by the influence of fundamentalism and dispensationalism. Both of these traditions tend to focus on "winning souls" and "finding peace with God," while neglecting the notions of daily discipleship, service and social justice. Furthermore, many proponents of fundamentalism and dispensationalism have routinely insisted that Christians are to give their highest priority to the "essentials" of the gospel, which they identify narrowly as the message of salvation, thereby minimizing any theological emphases they consider to be "non-essentials" (for example, Mennonite Brethren convictions concerning discipleship and peacemaking).[61]

The result is that some Canadian Mennonite Brethren have subordinated social activism to that of evangelism. For example, in 1924, 1966 and in 1972 Mennonite Brethren affirmed that proclamation of the gospel and social action were "inseparable tasks for the believing community," but that "relief and welfare concerns, however necessary, [were] subsidiary to the major task of proclamation."[62] In addition, leaders such as John A. Toews and John Redekop, along with Mennonite Brethren missions agencies, repeatedly echoed the conviction that the primary task was to invite people to experience reconciliation with God first.[63] Some Canadian Mennonite Brethren have regarded the "social gospel movement" with suspicion, going so far as to question

whether MCC actually shared the gospel because it emphasized "good works" before "good news."[64]

In short, prioritizing a personal experience of salvation has suggested to some Canadian Mennonite Brethren that spiritual and moral concerns—inward transformation—are more important than community and public concerns—social transformation.[65] As a result, some Canadian Mennonite Brethren have found it easy to assume that peacemaking is simply unnecessary.[66] After all, if peace is mostly a "spiritual thing," if "saving souls" is all that is necessary, then working for social justice is not essential. There are Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have thus concluded that peace is a private matter, and working for peace in the "daily grind of human relationships" at church and at home is not required.

Moreover, a longstanding tradition that emphasizes personal piety and nonconformity to the standards of the world has inadvertently discouraged peacemaking as well.[67] Because the church is to be "in the world," but not "of the world," some Canadian Mennonite Brethren have hesitated to engage with the needs of the surrounding culture (for example, participating in politics) because they have feared ethical compromise.[68] At the same time, the challenges of migration to Canada, the pain of being marginalized during the World Wars and the upheaval of urbanization prompted many Mennonite Brethren to build and maintain cultural boundaries that not only offered a sense of protection, but also fostered a sense of ethnic superiority that lingered well into the 1970s. Many Canadian Mennonite Brethren have been standoffish in regards to peacemaking because purity was considered to be so important that it has seemed better to remain within the bounds of their religious and ethnic communities.[69]

Lack of Training

Inadequate training is a sixth factor that has discouraged robust peacemaking among some Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Perhaps it is a result of indifference, or maybe it is due to lack of time, or even because some Mennonite Brethren churches have hired leaders who are unaware of Mennonite Brethren convictions, but in some cases teaching about peacemaking has been absent[70]—even though Canadian Mennonite Brethren have routinely intensified their efforts at promoting peacemaking.[71] Meanwhile, when teaching has taken place, it has frequently presented a limited understanding of peacemaking.

As noted earlier, for instance, up until the 1960s, teaching tended to focus primarily on pacifism, leading many to assume that as long as they did not go to war, they were being peaceful.[72]

To be sure, the quality of training has improved in the last half century. For example, Mennonite Brethren at Fresno Pacific University in California and Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba have developed mediation and conflict resolution materials and courses for congregations and individuals. Meanwhile, Mennonite Brethren in British Columbia have been providing conflict resolution seminars to their churches in recent years. Yet peacemaking within the church or at home often remains undernourished.[73] While interest in conflict transformation has steadily grown, and numerous Canadian Mennonite Brethren repeatedly affirm that compassionate confrontation and loving discipline are integral to faith, many individuals and congregations continue to lack the skills and the systems that would help in their efforts to foster peace through mutual accountability.[74] As a result, many Canadian Mennonite Brethren have not seen healthy conflict and reconciling discipline play a regular, formative part in a maturing life of faith.[75] For example, in 1988 a Mennonite Brethren pastor had to first do some in-depth study on the topic of church discipline before providing his congregation with considerable teaching on what, to them, was an unfamiliar tradition.[76] In sum, the ability to nurture peace as agents of reconciliation has proven difficult for numerous Canadian Mennonite Brethren because many individuals and congregations simply do not know how to "fight well." They have not been equipped with the necessary skills to resolve disputes or critique others in ways that are appropriate and just.[77]

Conclusion

In 2004, the editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* declared, "We probably all understand in our heads the command to peace and non-resistance, but what is needed is more obedience."[78] The evidence suggests, however, that because of unclear definitions and a lack of training, Canadian Mennonite Brethren have different concepts in mind when it comes to what peace is and how peacemaking ought to look. Moreover, the evidence also suggests that church structures, theological values and cultural orientations have worked in a variety of ways to prevent countless Canadian Mennonite Brethren from having a vision of peacemaking they consider worthy of obedience—whether

it is as individuals or as congregations, or as provincial or national conferences.

Despite that rather bleak assessment, one must remember that there are innumerable Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have refused to go to war, who have worked tirelessly for the sake of justice in their towns and provinces, who have worked to resolve conflict and see friends and family, neighbors and strangers experience reconciliation with each other and with God. Furthermore, the evidence above also offers hope—it suggests that if leaders and churches address the structures, assumptions and convictions that impede peacemaking, they might be more effective at capturing the imaginations of more Canadian Mennonite Brethren with a clear, comprehensive, coherent and cogent vision of peace that inspires a more robust and consistent peace witness.

May Canadian Mennonite Brethren be more obedient to the Prince of Peace, indeed.

Endnotes

1 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1999), 143.

2 Abe J. Dueck, "Church and State: Developments Among Mennonite Brethren in Canada Since World War II," *Direction* 10, no. 3 (July 1981): 46.

3 The 1902 Confession of Faith states, "We...do not feel justified to carry the sword." A 1919 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "For on the matter of war we believe and confess... it is manifestly contrary to the principle of the kingdom of Christ, and therefore our members are forbidden to participate in it." A 1936 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "we declare our opposition to war in any form and our determination to practice peace and love." A 1969 Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "we, in commitment to Christ and the Scripture cannot participate in military service intended to destroy human life, but that in gratitude we offer to our country constructive, alternative service." The 1975 Confession of Faith states, "We believe that it is not God's will that Christians take up arms in military service." Article 13 of the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith states, "We view violence in its many different forms as contradictory to the new nature of the Christian...In times of national conscription or war, we believe we are called to give alternative service where possible." See John E. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Statements on War and Peace in North America," in *The Power of the Lamb*, eds. John E. Toews and Gordon

Nickel (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1986), 131, 133, 137, 166, 175; and *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches*, 1999 Edition, 143.

4 A 1936 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "It is our conviction that the practice of the principles of peace, love, justice, liberty and national and international goodwill serve towards the highest good for...any activity which destroys or causes loss of human life [is] unjust and contrary to true discipleship." A 1954 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "The practice of the redeemed in Christ demands every phase of their life in all relationships, such as personal, social, national, and international be governed by the supreme law of love, and is not limited to an abstinence from military service." The 1975 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith states, "The Christian seeks to practice Christ's law of love in all relationships, and in all situations, including those involving personal injustice, social upheaval and international tensions." Article 13 in the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith defines peacemaking in part with the statement, "Alleviating suffering, reducing strife, and promoting justice are ways of demonstrating Christ's love." See John E. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Statements on War and Peace in North America," in *The Power of the Lamb*, eds. John E. Toews and Gordon Nickel (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1986), 138, 157, 175; and *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition*, 143.

Mennonite Brethren membership manuals emphasize peacemaking as well. For example, the 1968 manual states, "Mennonite Brethren practice nonviolence and prefer to give positive service for peace" (*A Manual for Church Membership Classes* [Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1968], 53). The 1980s version states, "We are peacemakers" (Ron Vogt, *Getting on Board: A Mennonite Brethren Membership Manual* [Winnipeg: Kindred Press], 53). A version published in the 1990s states, "Peace must become a way of life for the mature Christian...[Peace] is putting in place things which create wholeness and well-being. To follow Jesus means that we help those in need" (Herb Kopp, *New Life in Christ: A Manual for Membership Classes in Mennonite Brethren Churches* [Winnipeg: Kindred Productions], 35).

5 As noted earlier, a 1954 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution states, "The practice of the redeemed in Christ demands every phase of their life in all relationships, such as personal...be governed by the supreme law of love." The 1975 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith states that, "Christians should live by the law of love and practice the forgiveness of enemies as taught and exemplified by the Lord Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, is a fellowship of redeemed, separated people, controlled by redemptive love... The Christian seeks to practice Christ's law of love in all relationships, and in all situations." Article 13 of the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith states, "Believers seek to be agents of reconciliation in all relationships, to practice love of enemies as taught by Christ, to be peacemakers in all situations." See also Henry J. Schmidt, "The Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," in *The Power of the Lamb*, eds. John E. Toews and Gordon Nickel (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1986), 89-90.

6 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition*, 144; Kazuhiro Enomoto, "Peacemakers in All Situations: A Meditation on Love and Nonresistance," *Direction* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 16-17; John E. Toews, "Introduction," in *The Power of the Lamb*, eds. John E. Toews and Gordon Nickel (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1986), 1.

7 John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 232-233, 355-358. Mennonite Brethren leaders responded by encouraging renewed efforts at instructing young people "in this fundamental principle of our faith." See A. E. Janzen and Herbert Giesbrecht, *We Recommend...Recommendations and Resolutions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1978), 172. See also T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 35-59.

8 Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), 74.

9 Similarly, Harold Jantz lamented that most Canadian Mennonite Brethren "have put the question of peace and non-resistance far down the list of important issues to think about. A generation of young people has grown up with virtually no serious exposure to it." See Harold Jantz, "An agenda for peace-loving Christians," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 7, 1980, 12. Almost a decade later, John Redekop observed that the peace position was increasingly regarded as "both optional as well as set apart from biblical evangelical orthodoxy. The result is that in more than a few of our congregations, the peace emphasis is passé." See John H. Redekop, "Eras of peace," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 25, 1988, 19.

10 J. A. Toews, "In search of identity," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 10, 1972, 3.

11 John H. Redekop, "MB and MCC," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, December 3, 1965, 2.

12 John H. Redekop, "MB soup kitchens," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 3, 1986, 12.

13 When Rudy Wiebe's book, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, was published in the early 1960s, he was heavily criticized for a story that portrayed Mennonite racism, bigotry, subjugation of women, and abuse of power. Remarkably, Wiebe's critics did not question the believability of the events he had written. Rather, they were upset that he had talked about "church sins" in public. Rudy Wiebe, "The Skull in the Swamp," in *River of Stone: Fictions and Memories*, 249-273 (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1995), 270.

Similar patterns of behavior remain fifty years later. Between 1995 and 2005 I had the privilege of visiting sixty-three Mennonite Brethren churches in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. In twenty-five of those congregations I heard a variety of tragic stories about schisms, harmful treatment of staff and spousal abuse. Of course, this does not mean that all of the churches in conflict were not trying their best to bring about reconciliation. My point is simply that Canadian Mennonite Brethren have struggled to live up to their ideals.

14 Katie Funk Wiebe, "Keeping peace in the church," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, December 28, 1984, 23.

15 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition*, 56, 81, 144, 209-210. Compare with Peter J. Kroeker, "Peace, Justice, Evangelism: The Mission of the Church," *Direction* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 19; Elmer A. Martens, "God's Goal is Shalom," in Toews and Nickel, 25-34; and Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 27-43.

16 Guy F. Hershberger, "Pacifism," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement*, eds. Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, vol. 4 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 104-105.

17 For example, Driedger and Kraybill write, "An abundance of empirical evidence underscores the depth of pacifism in the Mennonite experience." Given the thrust of their argument, they could have easily (and more accurately) said, "An abundance of empirical evidence underscores the depth of peacemaking in the Mennonite experience." See Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1994), 30.

18 Harold S. Bender, "The Pacifism of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 30, no. 1 (1956): 5; Duane K. Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1986), 19-28; Hershberger, "Pacifism," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 104-105; and James Turner Johnson, "Two Kinds of Pacifism: Opposition to the Political Use of Force in the Renaissance-Reformation Period," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (1984): 40, 43.

19 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition*, 143-52. See also Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 63-79; and Schmidt, "Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," 94-96.

20 Abe Dueck, "North American Mennonite Brethren and Issues of War, Peace and Nonresistance," in *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Paul Toews (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995), 12.

21 Ronald C. Arnett, "Conflict Viewed from the Peace Tradition," *Brethren Life and Thought* 23, no. 2 (1978): 95; Ernst Crous, "Nonresistance," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement*, eds. Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, vol. 3 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 897-907; and Glen H. Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Defining Violence and Nonviolence," in *Teaching Peace*, ed. J. Denny Weaver and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 21-22.

22 This stands in contrast to some Mennonite Brethren who conflate force and coercion with violence. For example, see Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, "Solving the Problem of Violence," *Direction* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 62.

23 Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking*, 143-144; Stassen and Westmoreland-White, "Defining Violence," 18-20.

24 Arnett, "Conflict," 95; Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking*, 147-153; Stassen and Westmoreland-White, "Defining Violence," 24-25.

25 Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking*, 152.

26 Friesen explains that "Coercion that 'orders' human social behavior into patterns of cooperation that is not exploitive is essential to human social life" (*Christian Peacemaking*, 60). For example, ostracism (threatened or actual) can be a non-violent pressure that prevents one from abusing a child.

27 I base this continuum on Duane Friesen's work (*Christian Peacemaking*, 60-61, 152-153).

28 Phil Kniss, "Nine Modest Proposals for Mennonites on the Road Toward Peace," Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Committee, Orrville, OH, http://peace.mennolink.org/resources/binserts/bi9.pdf (accessed March 8, 2008).

29 Arnett, "Conflict," 93-97; Crous, "Nonresistance," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*; and Schmidt, "Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," 89, 93.

30 *1968 Yearbook of the fifty-eighth Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America*, 40-65; John E. Toews, "Love Your Enemy into the Kingdom," in Toews and Nickel, 7-16.

31 Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 8; and John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

32 For helpful discussions of peace theology, and for a glimpse of how the phrases peace position, peace witness, peacemaking, and peace theology are often fluid, see John Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991); and Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Essays on Peace Theology and Witness* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1988).

33 Janzen and Giesbrecht, *We Recommend*, 290. See also Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 133-158; and Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Pursuing Peace: The Essence of Mennonite Central Committee*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg: Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 2009), 24-29.

34 Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 13-14, 33, 62-64, 131. Compare with Donald R. Fitzkee, "An Anabaptist Peace Ethic for a New Century," *Brethren Life and Thought* 39, no. 3 (1994): 190-193.

35 See article 9 of the 1902 Confession of Faith, the 1948 Board of Reference and Counsel Statement, the 1954 General Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution, the 1968 Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference Resolution, article 15 of the 1975 Confession of Faith, and article 13 of the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Compare this with Katie Funk Wiebe, *Who Are the Mennonite Brethren?* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 348-350; John A. Toews, *People of the Way: Selected Essays and Addresses* (Winnipeg: Historical Committee of the Board of Higher Education, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1981), 127-136, as well as Schmidt, "Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," 92-93.

36 Mervin Dick, "The Way of Peace," in Toews and Nickel, 77-78. Frank C. Peters gives the strong impression that to use any force is a denial of God ("Why I am a Christian Pacifist," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, July 9, 1976, 7). John A. Toews once declared that Jesus, the model of nonresistance, "did not use force but suffering love to achieve his objectives" (*People of the Way*, 95). Henry J. Schmidt stated that central to kingdom living was a willingness to suffer the consequences of evil "rather than preventing it through force" ("Mennonite Brethren

Peace Witness," 90). David Esau contrasts "lamb power" (suffering) with "tiger power" (politics and force) and, without so much as saying it, gives the strong impression that any use of force is counter to the way of Jesus ("Lamb Power," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 27, 1996, 8-9).

37 John E. Toews, "Love Your Enemy into the Kingdom," Toews and Nickel, 12-13; John E. Toews, "Peacemakers from the Start," in Toews and Nickel, 48, 54-55; Dick, "Way of Peace," 77; Toews, *People of the Way*, 130. The commentary on article 13 in the 1999 Confession of Faith is particularly good at demonstrating the active nature of love and nonresistance. Interestingly, the commentary perpetuates the problem of definitional ambiguity. The heading, "Peacemaking Rather than Pacifism," appears yet the following paragraphs neither mention nor define pacifism!

In an effort to broaden the scope and application of nonresistance, and in an effort to capture the sense of active efforts at reconciliation, some Mennonite Brethren used the language of "active compassion" or "limitless love" (Schmidt, "Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," 89, 96).

38 Dick, "Way of Peace," 83.

39 Dick, "Way of Peace," 78, 85.

40 Peters, "Why I am a Christian Pacifist."

41 Fortunately, the commentary on article 13 in the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith does a commendable job of identifying and explaining a variety of very practical ways in which peacemaking can be pursued in the ordinary events of everyday life.

42 John H. Redekop, "Race and the Gospel of Love," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 2, 1965, 2; Schmidt, "Mennonite Brethren Peace Witness," 96.

43 Letters to the editor, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, December 8, 1994, 12.

44 Letters to the editor, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 16, 1965, 2, 14-15. Ironically, writers such as John A. Toews went to great lengths to try and explain how biblical nonresistance was different from that of secular nonresistance (*People of the Way*, 130-133).

45 Dalton Reimer, "Toward a Holistic Understanding of Peace: The Twentieth-Century Journey," *Direction* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 5.

46 For more detailed discussions on how the Canadian context has shaped Canadian Mennonite Brethren peacemaking efforts, see J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000), 34-46; John Redekop, "Canadian Pacifism," in *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types*, eds., John Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991), 60-68; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Peoplehood: A Plea for New Initiatives* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1977), 51-84 and Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Canadian Mennonite Nationalism? The 49th Parallel in the Structuring of Mennonite Life," in *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism*, ed. Abe Dueck (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), 89-110.

47 John H. Redekop, "Poor Canadians," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 20, 1968, 2.

48 Redekop, "Poor Canadians." See also Redekop, "MB soup kitchens."

49 The argument could be made that individualistic consumerism is another aspect of Canadian culture. I have chosen to identify it as a separate factor because

individualistic consumerism is not unique to Canadian culture, but is a much broader cultural phenomenon influencing much (if not all) of the western world. For a much more detailed discussion of how individualistic consumerism affects Canadian Anabaptist-Mennonite perspectives on peacemaking, see Jonathan Janzen, "A Complicated Peace: The Problem of Passivism in Canadian Anabaptist-Mennonite Peacemaking" (M.C.S. Thesis, Regent College, 2011), 115-121.

50 John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59-64; Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 73-106, 164-178. See also Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987); Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 72-87, 147-148, 160-173; and Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 61, 63, 75, 156.

51 Paul Toews, "Searching for the Right Structures," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), 57-62.

52 The study conference on baptism and church membership in 2003 revealed that an emphasis on accountability—giving other people permission to "mind your business"—is now deemed restrictive, a barrier that hinders growth. See Ken Peters, "Summary Report on the Baptism and Membership Study Conference," *Direction* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 67; and Walter Unger, "The Church 'Without Spot or Wrinkle': Testing the Tradition," *Direction* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 38-42.

53 John D. Roth, *Beliefs: Mennonite Faith and Practice* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005), 151; and Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 273.

54 Letters to the editor, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 2008.

55 Janzen and Giesbrecht, *We Recommend*, 290.

56 Dave Dyck, "Another look at the Great Commission," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 3, 1986, 3. See also Redekop, "MB soup kitchens"; and John H. Redekop, "A concern," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 15, 1988, 12.

57 In 1970 leaders of the BC Mennonite Brethren Conference noted the existence of a prevailing assumption that the primary function of "Home Churches" was to meet the needs of Mennonite Brethren members, and the task of reaching into the community to reach the unsaved could be left to the "Mission Churches." See *Minutes of the June Convention of the British Columbia Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches*, June 5-6, 1970, 32.

58 Kroeker, "Peace, Justice, Evangelism," 20-21.

59 1975 Confession of Faith; 1999 Confession of Faith; and John E. Toews, "Response: The Theology and Strategy of Peace as Evangelism," *Direction* 3, no. 1 (April 1974): 173-176.

60 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 364-66; and Lynn Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance," in *For Everything a*

Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, ed., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), 44.

61 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 375-379; Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance," 47-50; Redekop, "Race and the Gospel of Love"; Redekop, "A concern"; Dueck, "North American Mennonite Brethren and Issues of War, Peace and Nonresistance," 5-17; Noll, *Scandal*, 110-39; and Olson, *Reformed*, 17-26.

62 Janzen and Giesbrecht, *We Recommend*, 290-292, 297, 326.

63 Toews, *People of the Way*, 132; John H. Redekop, "The essence of the gospel," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 26, 1979, 12; John H. Redekop, "The cult of pacifism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, July 6, 1984; John H. Redekop, "Peace and MCC," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 18, 1988; and Hans Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885-1984" (ThD diss., University of South Africa, 1986), 613-631.

64 Redekop, "MB and MCC"; and John Longhurst, "Answering the critics: Does MCC share the gospel?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 28, 1988, 14-15.

65 Dueck, "Church and State," 46.

66 Some were even willing to abandon peacemaking believing that it was a barrier to evangelism (Toews, "Introduction," in *Power of the Lamb*, 1).

67 Jost, "Mennonite Brethren Theology: A Multiple Inheritance," 44, 46.

68 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 323-360; John H. Redekop, "Mennonite Brethren in a Changing Society," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), 161-165; Wally Unger, "Broadening Our Horizons," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), 169; and Funk Wiebe, *Who are the Mennonite Brethren?* 48-49.

69 Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada, 1883-1983* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 153-155; Redekop, "Mennonite Brethren in a Changing Society," 158-159; and Wally Unger, "Broadening Our Horizons," 171, 173.

70 Part of this would, of course, be due to the local congregation's autonomy.

71 In the wake of World War I, Canadian Mennonite Brethren formed the Committee on Nonresistance with the specific task of promoting the Mennonite Brethren peace position (Janzen and Giesbrecht, *We Recommend*, 168, 171; Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 348-349, 354), yet Henry Baerg, who grew up in the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church, does not recall receiving any teaching or instruction about peacemaking until the draft loomed in 1941 (A. J. Klassen, ed., *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada During World War II, 1941-1946* [Mennonite Central Committee (B.C.) Seniors for Peace, 1998], 33). In 1986, *The Power of the Lamb* was published as part of an effort to increase awareness of peacemaking.

72 In the 1970s and the decades to follow, peacemaking was broadened to include issues related to social justice (Reimer, "Toward a Holistic Understanding of Peace," 4, 7-8).

73 Calvin Redekop, "Power in the Anabaptist Community," in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, ed. Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Re-

dekop (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 220, n48. See also Katie Funk Wiebe, "Making Peace with Violence," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 15, 1977, 32; Redekop, "Cult of pacifism"; John H. Redekop, "Peace—Six Expressions," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, February 21, 1986, 12; John H. Redekop, "Why is Christian 'Nonresistance' Weakening Among MBs?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 14, 1986, 10; John H. Redekop, "A Re-assessment of Some Traditional Anabaptist Church-State Perspectives," in *Essays on Peace Theology and Witness*, Willard Swartley, ed. (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1988), 62-64, 68; and Tom Yoder Neufeld, "Resistance and Nonresistance: The Two Legs of a Biblical Peace Stance," *Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 57-58.

74 John A. Esau, "Why Bother with Membership?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 17, 2000, 11; Philip A. Gunther, "Community: Defining A 'Simple' Word," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 17 2000, 4-5; James Nikkel, "Practical and Biblical Reasons for Church Membership," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 8, 2000, 10; Roger C. Sider, "Covenant, Contract & Community," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 17, 2000, 8-9; and Unger, "The Church," 43-45.

75 Hans Kasdorf, "Church Discipline: A Redemptive Approach," *The Journal of Church and Society* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1970): 40-61; and Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling in the Church: Recovering a Ministry of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1988), 105-109, 115. Jeschke's argument brings to mind the common practice of preventive medicine, whereby doctors encourage lifestyle choices that promote health, rather than waiting until their patients get sick before helping them. Doctors thus "treat" their patients by encouraging them to avoid smoking, for instance, so that they avoid treatment for heart disease or cancer later in life.

76 Barbara Armstrong, "A Story of Restoration," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 17, 2000, 12-13.

77 A number of helpful resources include Ronald S. Kraybill, *Repairing the Breach: Ministering in Community Conflict* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980); David W. Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront: The Love Fight* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1981); Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *When Good People Quarrel: Studies of Conflict Resolution* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989); John Paul Lederach and Alice Price, *Conflict Transformation: A Vision and Skills for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution in Our Daily Lives* (Akron: Mennonite Conciliation Service, 1989); John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2003); Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, eds. *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1999); Mary Yoder Holsopple, Ruth E. Krall and Sharon Weaver Pittman, *Building Peace: Overcoming Violence in Communities* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2004); and Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja, *A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2005). With the exception of Augsburger's book, these resources have gained little traction at the grassroots level. Is it because the field of conflict transformation is relatively new? Are these resources too esoteric? Is it due to a lack

of advertising? Is it because none of those books are written by Mennonite Brethren authors? I suspect it is a combination of those and other factors, along with the fact that most Canadian Mennonite Brethren leaders have not given sustained attention to the teaching of interpersonal peacemaking.

78 Susan Brandt, "Talking About Peace," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 5, 2004, 3.

Theological *Reflections*

Confessing Our Faith: The Significance of the Confession of Faith in the Life of the Mennonite Brethren Church

Doug Heidebrecht

The Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith quietly stands in the background of any conversation about Mennonite Brethren identity, theology and mission. It is always there as a silent faith marker—ominous in its communal nature, yet sometimes held at arm's length by individuals or congregations. In a recent conversation I was challenged, "Does the Confession really matter as long as our churches are growing?" Certainly, the Confession comes to the fore as a key reference point when hiring or credentialing pastoral staff, during baptismal classes for new church members, or when particular doctrinal or ethical stances are raised. However, the rather neat, yet artificial, distinction between theology and practice (or theoreticians and practitioners) subtly implies that a description of what Mennonite Brethren believe loses relevance in the midst of the daily ministry of the church.

Raising the question of the significance of the Confession of Faith, however, goes beyond simply taking a poll regarding whether people have read the Confession or not. I wonder, how is the Confession of Faith a living profession shaping not only the belief but also the practice of Mennonite Brethren churches? My interest is in asking how the Confession of Faith represents Mennonite Brethren convictions, their deepest commitments expressed not only in what they believe but also in what they do.[1] I will begin by surveying the development of Mennonite Brethren confessions and then examine how Mennonite Brethren have approached the Confession in the context of the church. An understanding of how the Confession of Faith functions needs to move beyond the perception that it simply describes what Mennonite Brethren believe to recognizing how it can shape Mennonite Brethren hermeneutics, discipleship and mission.

A Confessing Church

Over the last 150 years, Mennonite Brethren have professed their central beliefs and practices through several different confessional expressions. While these various confessions reflect changing circumstances and particular contexts, they also reveal a profound consistency that represents a shared interpretive framework.

When Mennonite Brethren began in 1860 they insisted they were in complete agreement with the existing Mennonite confession accepted by Mennonites in Russia. Their concern as a revival movement was not with specific aspects of Mennonite beliefs, but with how people lived out their faith in daily life. This Mennonite Confession was first published by the West Prussian churches in 1660 in German and eventually went through seven printings over 250 years.[2] The sixth edition, published in Odessa, South Russia, in 1853, was the version looked upon by the early Mennonite Brethren as their own confession.[3] This Confession clearly stood in the Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition and was the basis for clarifying Mennonite Brethren belief for the first forty years of the movement.[4]

In 1873 one Mennonite Brethren congregation in Russia (Einlage) adopted a German Baptist confession in an attempt to address ongoing questions about Mennonite Brethren identity. This Baptist confession had been written in 1837 by Johann Oncken, the Baptist leader in Hamburg, three years after the German Baptists began as a revival movement.[5] The Einlage congregation added a "peculiarly Anabaptist-Mennonite" position to this Baptist confession, which included sections on believer's baptism, the Lord's Supper, church discipline, foot washing, the role of government and the use of the oath.[6] This Confession was printed in 1876 and sent to the Russian government in response to questions regarding the fledging Mennonite Brethren movement. However, there was considerable dissatisfaction by Mennonite Brethren leaders regarding the adequacy of this revised Baptist confession and it was never formally adopted by any other Mennonite Brethren congregation.[7]

In 1898, the same year that the larger Mennonite group in Russia published a new Confession, Mennonite Brethren appointed a study commission to revise the earlier 1853 Mennonite Confession. However, all revision attempts faltered and so an entirely new Confession was written in 1900, presented to churches for ratification and eventually printed in 1902.[8] The large number of biblical references used in

the 1902 Confession—117 from the Old Testament and 696 from the New Testament—highlighted the biblical orientation of the writers. The words and phrases of the earlier 1853 Confession were followed in fifteen of the twenty-five major topics discussed, while nine articles covered topics reflecting later pietistic and Baptist influences.[9] The 1902 Confession reflected an intentional doctrinal positioning, which was consistent with Mennonite Brethren Anabaptist roots and also embraced their evangelical convictions.

Almost sixty-five years later the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, representing churches in the United States and Canada, approved a recommendation to revise the 1902 Confession of Faith. The primary motivation behind this revision was the desire to use contemporary language in order to make the Confession both accessible and understandable for youth.[10] While the first draft was already completed in 1969, it wasn't until 1975 that the seventh draft was finally accepted by General Conference delegates. The 1975 Confession was shortened considerably—down to 2450 words from 6500—and biblical references were both reduced (19 Old Testament and 118 New Testament) and moved from the text itself to footnotes. The article on foot washing was dropped because this traditional ceremony was no longer regularly practiced in Mennonite Brethren churches.

In 1987, as part of a renewed call for confessional integrity, the General Conference Board of Faith and Life proposed revising several of the confessional articles in an attempt to develop greater consensus around the Confession of Faith.[11] They began with perhaps the most contentious issues, the articles on Peace and Nonresistance and the Lord's Supper. By 1990 the Board recognized that this initial revision should be an ongoing process.[12] In 1993 it became apparent that the entire confession needed to be rewritten, which would also entail the addition of several new articles to address pressing questions facing the church.[13] The complete revision was projected to take approximately a decade; however, in the face of growing questions about the possible dissolution of the General Conference, the Board of Faith and Life revised its timeline. A final draft was presented for ratification in 1999.

The 1999 Confession of Faith was expanded over the 1975 version, both in size (4850 words) and in the number of articles (from sixteen to eighteen). As well, the biblical support was strengthened significantly with 90 Old Testament and 325 New Testament references. The current Confession comes in several forms: the full ver-

sion including a commentary discussing the biblical background and a pastoral application reflecting on implementation in the life of the church; a digest version with all eighteen articles in abbreviated form; a sidewalk version briefly introducing Mennonite Brethren beliefs; and a liturgical version for use in worship.[14]

In 1997 the newly formed International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) asked the question, "What do MBs around the world believe?"[15] By 2001 ICOMB had commissioned a seven-member task force to write a summary of Mennonite Brethren convictions.[16] ICOMB members from Asia, Africa, Europe, South America and North America surveyed existing confessional materials and considered the primary questions Mennonite Brethren encounter around the world.[17] This task force completed the two-part document in 2004, with the hope that it would assist national conferences formulating confessions specific to their own cultures as well as define Mennonite Brethren convictions for churches inquiring about joining the Mennonite Brethren.[18]

The format of the first section of ICOMB's Confession represents an Asian and African narrative approach to theology, which seeks to address the question, "How does God work in the world?" through the story of God's creation, the fall and God's re-creation. The second section answers the question, "How do MBs respond to God's purpose?" by describing five core Mennonite Brethren values regarding the church.[19] This international Confession complements the current North American Confession of Faith as a parallel statement representing a global Mennonite Brethren perspective.[20]

Approaching the Confession of Faith

How do Mennonite Brethren understand the character of their Confession? In other words, how is the Confession of Faith to be understood as a representation of Mennonite Brethren convictions? In 1987 the General Conference approved a resolution on the Confession of Faith that sought to clarify the meaning of the Confession within the life of the church.[21]

Descriptive of What the Bible Teaches

The Confession of Faith is essentially descriptive, not in the sense of reflecting a survey regarding what Mennonite Brethren typically

believe, but rather of what the Bible teaches. This is an important distinction to make. The Confession represents a shared Mennonite Brethren understanding of the message and intent of the Scriptures. As a description of what the Bible teaches, the Confession points beyond itself to the Bible. The Confession "is authoritative to the extent that it is biblical," since final authority always rests in the Scriptures.[22]

Because the Confession is descriptive of what the Bible says, it is not a closed statement of faith, but open to periodic review and revision.[23] Mennonite Brethren are receptive to new light from God's Spirit because they recognize that their understanding of Scripture is limited and also that new issues continue to arise, which need to be addressed from a biblical perspective. The Confession can be changed or modified only when Mennonite Brethren come to a new understanding of an article through the study of the Scriptures together. During times when the Confession is open for review, the Bible is the standard by which it is evaluated.

Mennonite Brethren "practice a corporate hermeneutic, which listens to the concerns of individuals and churches, but discerns together the meaning and intent of the Scriptures."[24] This interpretive strategy is intended to protect Mennonite Brethren from the extremes of individualism and private interpretations, while at the same time allowing for free study and discussion.[25] The Confession represents a consensual process involving all Mennonite Brethren congregations.

Normative for Mennonite Brethren Churches

The Confession of Faith is also understood to be normative for Mennonite Brethren churches because it summarizes what Mennonite Brethren believe the Bible teaches. Thus, the Confession is binding for all Mennonite Brethren churches. Pastors, teachers and conference leaders are expected to affirm and teach the Confession of Faith.[26]

The idea of something being "normative" highlights concerns regarding what reflects a faithful reading of Scripture.[27] All confessional statements in any denomination are considered normative because each particular confession expresses a "community of faith's understanding about what constitutes faithfulness to the gospel."[28] Because it stands as a witness over against other understandings, the Confession of Faith functions as a discerning statement regarding what it means to be Mennonite Brethren.[29] Therefore, "to disagree with the

Confession is to declare that one does not understand the Bible as Mennonite Brethren do."[30]

Yet there is a level of flexibility in relation to the Confession of Faith that has not always been clearly articulated. In response to discussion by convention delegates in 1987, the Board of Reference and Counsel recognized that struggles with particular statements in the Confession were not incompatible with affirming the Confession in principle. Therefore, they called for "a principled confessional integrity, not a legalistic confessional rigidity."[31] What this actually looks like in practice, regarding how much variance from the Confession is acceptable, was never clarified.

A Unified Confession

The challenge of increasing theological diversity among Mennonite Brethren has prompted some to suggest that a two-tiered confessional approach would provide a feasible way of maintaining denominational unity. They suggest that dividing the Confession into "essential" beliefs that all Mennonite Brethren agree on and "nonessential" beliefs that could be negotiable would enable Mennonite Brethren to be unified around what is really important.[32]

At a 1988 study conference, Mennonite Brethren rejected the creation of a two-tiered Confession of Faith and affirmed a unified approach.[33] Every denominational confession reflects a particular stance or commitment that embodies the faith of a specific community and no confessional tradition has differentiated "essentials" from the "nonessentials."[34] There is much about Christian faith and practice that is not included in the Confession of Faith, where Mennonite Brethren recognize differing interpretations and perspectives. However, if the Confession addresses core convictions held by Mennonite Brethren *and* is descriptive of biblical teaching, then the categories of "essential" and "non-essential" are misleading. Inclusion in the Confession is already a declaration of what is "essential." Furthermore, the effect of removing from the Confession that which makes the Mennonite Brethren confession distinctive and particular is really a move to eliminate the need for a confession at all.

John Howard Yoder suggests that attempts to distinguish between what is essential and nonessential are "actually deceptive and theologically questionable" because if what is essential does not need to be contested or even examined *and* is also used to defend almost any

theological position, then the difference is in effect verbal rather than substantial.[35] Cognitive affirmation of a select group of propositional doctrines is often assumed to be the essential criteria of faithfulness to the gospel, yet it is unclear whether consensus on a few minimalist affirmations could actually unify the church.

Two unintended consequences may emerge from a two-tiered approach to the Confession. First, doctrines that are deemed to be non-essential could be perceived as not worth maintaining because they appear not really to matter. Instead, differences in interpretation should motivate believers with differing perspectives to walk toward each other in the search for truth. Second, the distinction between essential and non-essential may draw the line between the profession of what one believes and how one lives. At the heart of the Anabaptist movement is a strong connection between belief and discipleship. For example, it draws together the Mennonite Brethren affirmation of both the gospel of peace and life as a peacemaker.

The Significance of the Confession

How Mennonite Brethren approach the Confession of Faith shapes their expectations regarding how it will function in the life of the local church. I wish to identify several ways by which the Confession can serve the church as a living expression of their faith.

Functions as an Interpretive Guide

John E. Toews suggests that the Confession of Faith essentially functions as an interpretive guide, which spells out a corporate understanding of the intent and content of the Bible.[36] The Confession represents a consensual understanding of how Mennonite Brethren read the Bible together and so functions as a normative hermeneutical guide. It is a hermeneutical statement rather than a creedal document.

No matter what propositional view of biblical authority one has, the Bible does not function authoritatively in the church until it is interpreted and until there is consensus about how to interpret it.[37] Without interpretation, acknowledgement of the authority of the Bible is only a formal statement that is neither actual nor transformational. Asserting the authority of the Bible does not resolve interpretive questions because all readings require interpretation. Rather,

church unity is forged through hermeneutical consensus or a shared way of reading the Bible.[38]

The Confession acts as an interpretive guide in several ways. First, the Confession provides answers to particular theological and ethical questions. While the answers themselves may not overtly articulate the interpretive strategies used to arrive at the conclusions stated in the Confession, they do imply that interpretive strategies used to arrive at different conclusions may not be acceptable. At times, resolutions approved at conference conventions may provide more explicit interpretive details regarding specific issues and so complement the Confession itself.

Second, the Confession highlights what Mennonite Brethren understand is at the center of their faith and practice. By articulating Mennonite Brethren core convictions and identifying significant theological and ethical issues facing the church today, the Confession can help focus the teaching/preaching ministry in a congregation.[39] An awareness of these priorities can also shape a common missional response as churches respond to the questions and needs of those around them.

Third, the Confession provides an interpretive lens through the specific language and categories it uses, which reveals how Mennonite Brethren view the Bible and describe its teaching. This lens often reflects an attempt to hear the Bible in its own terms, without imposing foreign categories or philosophical assumptions onto the text. Nevertheless, the Confession also seeks to interpret and explain biblical teaching in relevant and meaningful ways for a contemporary audience. This Mennonite Brethren perspective contributes to a shared understanding of Scripture's message.

Functions as an Expression of Faithful Discipleship

If a corporate consensus regarding how to read the Bible provides the basis for understanding what the Bible teaches within the church, then the Confession of Faith also functions as an expression of what it means to be faithful disciples who are unified around the Scriptures. The Confession is not intended to become a creedal statement by defining faith in rigid propositional terms that tend to become disconnected from the ongoing life of the church over time. Rather the Confession is intended to serve as an active manual of discipleship, ex-

pressing shared Mennonite Brethren convictions that have the power to shape the corporate life of the church.

The Confession, along with the commentary and pastoral application, serves as a teaching tool in the church by conveying what faithful discipleship looks like as belief and practice are drawn together. To relegate the Confession of Faith to something that is simply affirmed, without also actively shaping how one lives, is tantamount to acknowledging the Bible's authority without experiencing its transforming ability. The Mennonite Brethren emphasis on discipleship, described as both learning from and following after Jesus, underlies the significance of the Confession of Faith within the life of the church.

Functions as a Missional Witness

Just as the Confession attempts to describe the teaching of Scripture faithfully, so too it seeks to present the triune God accurately as one who offers salvation to all through Jesus Christ and calls all to follow him. The Confession of Faith functions as a witness to the character and work of God, the nature of salvation through Jesus Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. The Confession is a missional statement because it proclaims the gospel message before a watching world.

As the various articles of the Confession are read together, they point to the gospel's call for the transformation of all of life as a result of God's work in Christ. This integrated reading portrays a holistic gospel that holds together, for example, the atoning work of Christ, the nature of the church, baptism and discipleship, God's creation and stewardship, and Christ's final triumph. The Confession highlights how one's missional witness in the world cannot be disconnected from one's core theological convictions.

Continuing Challenges

In conclusion, I wish to highlight several challenges facing Mennonite Brethren in relation to their Confession of Faith.

First, is the challenge of a global Mennonite Brethren identity. Even though Mennonite Brethren have often deliberately sought to distance themselves from any sense of identity that is too closely linked with a Dutch/German/Russian ethnicity, they have sometimes forgotten that all identities are necessarily contextualized. While the

current Canadian/American Confession represents core Mennonite Brethren convictions, it does so within a specific North American context. While Mennonite Brethren in the United States and Canada cannot extract themselves from this particular perspective, they must also recognize that being Mennonite Brethren entails a much broader global identity.

Mennonite Brethren in North America have much to learn from their brothers and sisters who seek to follow Jesus faithfully within very different cultural settings. A starting point for engagement could be a careful study of the ICOMB Confession of Faith. The point is not to develop a Confession abstracted from any particular context, but rather to embrace the richness that various cultural perspectives bring to an understanding of what it means to be Mennonite Brethren.

Another challenge is the growing theological diversity among Mennonite Brethren. While Mennonite Brethren claim that the Confession of Faith represents their theological center, the propensity to embrace a wide range of theological sources has tested their willingness to allow the Confession to shape their sense of identity. At times, the Confession of Faith has been effectively set aside when it is supplemented with confessions representing very different theological traditions. At other times, a "generic evangelical" identity is favored over a specific Mennonite Brethren confession, as if any other point of view could be free from the dynamics inherent in a particular perspective.[40]

I wonder, however, whether the real issue is not the wide variety of theological sources Mennonite Brethren look to, but the lack of relationships between them, which not only hampers their ability to search the Scriptures together in order to hear God's Spirit but also their willingness to walk toward each other when they disagree. While the Confession is supposed to reflect a corporate understanding of what the Bible teaches, relational and geographic isolation can easily mitigate against a shared understanding. Do Mennonite Brethren have enough relational "glue" to address the differences that exist among them?

The relevance of the Confession of Faith emerges out of how it functions in the life of the church. If Mennonite Brethren relegate the Confession to being a doctrinal statement, which they affirm but then put it on a shelf, it will fail to shape both their theological and ecclesiological identity. However, if Mennonite Brethren engage with the Confession by using it as an interpretive guide, as an expression of

faithful discipleship and as a missional witness to their experience with God, then the Confession will continue to point them back to the Scriptures and shape not only their identity as Mennonite Brethren but their life and mission as well.

Endnotes

1 James McClendon and James Smith define a conviction as "a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before." Convictions are expressed in what a person or community actually says and does, that is, both one's words and actions reveal one's convictions. See James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1994), 5.

2 Abram John Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith: Historical Roots and Comparative Analysis" (S.T.M. thesis, Union College of British Columbia, 1965), 105. The full title of this Mennonite confession reads: *Confession or Short and Simple Statement of Faith of Those who are Called the United Flemish, Frisian, and High German Anabaptist-Mennonite Church.* For an English translation see, Howard John Loewen, ed., *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 115-128.

3 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 106.

4 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 109.

5 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 106.

6 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 109.

7 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 107.

8 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 107. For an English translation see, Howard John Loewen, ed., *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 163-173. For an English translation of the Introduction to the 1902 Confession see, Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity, 1872-1922* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1997), 108-111.

9 Klassen, "Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith," 132.

10 Marvin Hein, "Introducing: A New Series on Our Confession of Faith," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, June 10, 1977, 27. See also A.J. Klassen, "Revising the Confession of Faith," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, July 25, 1969, 2-3; and A.J. Klassen, "The Process of Revision," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, August 8, 1969, 16.

11 See "Vision Statement for General Conference," *1987 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Abbotsford, August 7-11, 1987), 59-64.

12 *1990 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Hillsboro, September 28-October 2, 1990), 12.

13 *1993 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg, July 7-11, 1993), 14.
14 See *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000).
15 "ICOMB Confession of Faith," http://www.icomb.org/confession (accessed November 24, 2010).
16 "ICOMB Confession of Faith."
17 "ICOMB Confession of Faith."
18 "ICOMB Confession of Faith."
19 These include: people of the Bible, people of a new way of life, people of covenant community, people of reconciliation and people of hope. See "ICOMB Confession of Faith."
20 See Elmer A. Martens and Peter J. Klassen, eds., *Knowing and Living Your Faith: A Study of the Confession of Faith, International Community of Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008). Very few ICOMB national conferences have developed their own Confession of Faith.
21 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," *1987 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Abbotsford, August 7-11, 1987), 68-69.
22 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," 68.
23 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," 68.
24 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," 69.
25 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," 69.
26 "Resolution on Confession of Faith," 69.
27 John E. Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 28, 1988, 7.
28 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
29 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
30 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
31 *1987 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Abbotsford, August 7-11, 1987), 72.
32 The distinction between "essentials" and "non-essentials" goes back to the famous saying first used during the Thirty Years War in the early 1600s: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." See Mark Ross, "In Essentials Unity, In Non-essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity," *Tabletalk Magazine*, September 1, 2009, http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/essentials-unity-non-essentials-liberty-all-things/(accessed June 29, 2011).
33 Report of the Findings Committee, Board of Reference and Counsel Study Conference (Calgary, April 27-29, 1988), 1, CMBS (Winnipeg).
34 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 6.
35 John Howard Yoder, "The Contemporary Evangelical Revival and the Peace Churches," *Mission and the Peace Witness: The Gospel and Christian Discipleship*, ed. Robert L. Ramseyer (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1979), 98.
36 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
37 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
38 Toews, "The Meaning of the Confession," 7.
39 For a description of core Mennonite Brethren convictions, see Doug Heidebrecht, "Centered on Jesus: Mennonite Brethren Core Convictions," *Mennonite*

Brethren Herald, January 2010, 16-17; and Doug Heidebrecht, "What Binds Us Together?" *The Christian Leader*, December 2009/January 2010, 16-17.

40 Trevor Hart is helpful in his assessment of one's engagement with a particular tradition: "True freedom with respect to tradition, I would suggest, lies not in complete autonomy from it (the quest for which results only in our unwitting enslavement) but rather in a mature ability to discern the extent of our indebtedness to it, and yet a genuine willingness to hear other voices, other stories, and to be prepared in principle to revise our own tradition in the light of our engagement with reality." See Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 179.

Sola Scriptura and the Mennonite Brethren

Tim Geddert

The Bible is God's written Word, bearing witness to Christ, the Living Word. For Mennonite Brethren, the Bible is the faithful guide and the final authority for faith and practice. This they confess. But the Bible needs to be interpreted and applied. Scripture is both timely and timeless, both historical and contemporary, both human and divine. To truly honor and submit to God's Word, Mennonite Brethren need to move beyond pious slogans about Scripture, developing thoughtful and faithful strategies that preserve and enhance their commitment to biblical theology and faithful Christian practice.

Moving Beyond Simple Slogans

Many sincere Christians seem to be convinced that to be most faithful to Scripture they must aim to keep everything as simple as possible:

- If the Bible says it, believe it.
- If the Bible commands it, do it.
- If the Bible forbids it, avoid it.
- If the Bible promises it, claim it.
- Always interpret the Bible literally.
- Always apply the Bible literally.
- By all means avoid obscure or confusing arguments about history and culture.
- Just grasp the plain meaning of the text and go with that.
- God didn't intend for things to get complicated. It's people who make it complicated. God's Word is simple and clear and true.

Only one problem...the more people try to keep it simple in the short run, the more complicated it gets in the long run!

If the plain truth that I find in the Word doesn't agree with the plain truth that you find...what choice do I have but to consider *you* to be completely out of bounds...either not a very good reader or just resistant to the obvious truth of God's Word? And what choice do you have but to assume the same about me?

In the end, I believe that things get a lot *less* confusing and frustrating if Mennonite Brethren start with assumptions almost exactly the opposite of those I just listed[1]. There is, in fact, a great deal in Scripture which is not simple and straightforward, a lot that needs careful discernment and sometimes hard work, a lot that is open to serious dialog, and a lot that can quite easily lead to very diverse conclusions. If Mennonite Brethren assume that the task of interpreting Scripture is really worth their best efforts, worth investing time to learn and to practice, worth calling together diverse people to work at together in community...then they will re-discover the joy of Bible study, even if not the false comfort of easy assurances that they have it all figured out.

Saying What We Mean and Living What We Claim

I want to argue that pious sounding slogans about Scripture can be both dishonest (i.e., nobody really believes them, even though some people claim they do) and dangerous (i.e., when people claim a view that is not really theirs, they apply it selectively and that becomes a very dangerous sort of abuse of power.) And then, I want to offer some constructive suggestions.

I want to begin with some of the obvious examples. Some Bible interpreters clearly give the impression that the appropriate guideline for application is simply this:

- If the Bible commands it, do it.
- If the Bible promises it, claim it.
- If the Bible forbids it, avoid it.

The Bible forbids weaving two kinds of thread together in one piece of cloth. It commands people with two shirts to give one to those without any. It commands believers to greet fellow Christians with a holy kiss. It commands missionaries to take nothing for their journey,

no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. It even commands the reader, the very person the text was intended to address, to go to Troas and look for Paul's cloak. It commands literally thousands of things that I am clearly not expected to obey in any literal sense—either because the instructions are no longer relevant, or were never intended to be applied beyond the original context, or because they were never intended to be done by anyone except the first reader or hearer, or because the thing commanded had a cultural meaning that it no longer has. It sounds so simple: "If the Bible commands it, obey it." But, it would be much more honest and helpful if the principle would be: "If the Bible records a command, the church is challenged to discern whether it applies today or not, and if it does, in what way."

The Promise Box

Even more obviously fallacious is the claim that if the Bible promises it, claim it.

When I was growing up, my family had a "promise box." Each person in the family was invited to pull at random some biblical promise out of the box. Amazingly, the promise we pulled matched the needs of the day—unfailingly, it seemed! "I will never leave you nor forsake you" turned up just in time for a day when there was a particular challenge facing me (a test at school or a track meet). "I have loved you with an everlasting love" showed up when I wondered whether I had true friends at school.

The correspondence between the biblical promise and my own situation seemed convincing proof of the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, of the divine origin of the book and ultimately that the correct method of biblical application was, "God said it! I believe it! That settles it!"

The fact that everyone in my family regularly drew from the box promises that also met their daily needs proved that every promise applies to every reader, every day! There is also a Sunday school song to go with this conviction. "Every promise in the book is mine, every chapter every verse every line, all the blessings of his live divine; every promise in the book is mine."

A "promise box" approach to Scripture actually works very well, but for only one reason (it later dawned on me). Those who selected the promises to be included in the box did not believe the theory that

the promise box persuades its users to believe. They did *not* believe that all promises always apply to all readers at all times. That is why they could never sing, "Every promise in the *book* is mine." They could only sing, "Every promise in the *box* is mine."

That is why I never once in all my growing up years pulled out the scriptural promise that says, "In a year your wife will bear you a son!" (see Gen. 18:10-14). Not once did I ever pull from the box the promise of God, "I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run" (Exod. 23:27). I never drew such promises from the box, because the producers never put them into the box. And they never put them into the box because they knew that these were not among the 200 or so promises in Scripture that virtually always apply to virtually all people. Rather these promises were among the thousands of promises in the Bible that virtually never apply to anyone except to the individuals first addressed in their own particular circumstances.

In fact, "God said it! I believe it! That settles it!" is almost always a completely unreliable way of dealing with virtually every promise in Scripture, no matter how pious the slogan may sound.

A far more reliable principle would be: If the Bible records a promise, then the reader is challenged to discern who promised what to whom, and then to discern whether that promise applies to the modern reader as well, and if so, in what way.

While that may sound pretty cumbersome and unreliable to some people, experience has taught me that it is a lot more chaotic and confusing and unconvincing if people claim some kind of universal application to Bible commands and promises, and then live consistent with their convictions about twenty percent of the time. The problem is selectively deciding which twenty percent without being able to specify any criteria, because specifying criteria, would, of course, contradict what they claim to believe.

All of that is intended to say: Readers need to be honest about their convictions. They need to believe what they say. And then only say what they intend to live by. Readers need to search for reliable guidance that can help them take the Bible with utmost seriousness so they can believe its message and follow its instructions, honestly. Through Scripture the church is invited to listen in on how God revealed truth through instruction, promises, commands and divine intervention in the lives of others. And now, God invites readers to let the very texts that speak of these things speak again, as they discern with great care, what God is saying to them.

Sola Scriptura

I want to challenge Mennonite Brethren to think carefully about what they mean and what they believe when they call themselves a "people of the book." One of the most sacred of Mennonite Brethren slogans, though of course it did not originate with them, has been *Sola Scriptura, Allein das Wort,* The Bible Alone! If Mennonite Brethren want to be faithful in belief and practice, they must ask, "What does the Bible say?"

Mennonite Brethren confess: "We accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice."[2] In fact, people have often said that when Martin Luther popularized the phrase *Sola Scriptura*, he did not go far enough. He started down the right path, but the Anabaptists took it farther, putting into practice even those parts of being biblical that led to their own martyrdom. And now Mennonite Brethren sometimes claim that the renewal movement in the Mennonite colonies that led to the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Conference was a renewal of biblicism...studying the Bible more carefully, practicing it more faithfully.

If one of the marks of the Mennonite Brethren confessional family is that they take the Bible with utmost seriousness and view it as the final authority in all matters of faith and life, perhaps they would do well to reflect carefully about what they mean when they make those kinds of claims.

What *Sola Scriptura* Does Not Mean

I will begin with what they don't mean. What does *Sola Scriptura* *not* mean?

Sola Scriptura does not mean that the Bible interprets itself or that readers are innocent bystanders while the Bible talks to them. If only it were that simple. If only people could address a question to the Bible and it would simply tell them the answer.

Perhaps some people think it really is that simple. What question could be posed that would reflect a genuine wish for a clear word from Scripture? Perhaps, "Does the Bible or does it not teach that there are limits on the authority and ministry roles of women that transcend issues of circumstance and culture?" What does the Bible say to that, all by itself, without any human interpretation? Let the experiment

begin. Try it for yourself! When I try it, nothing happens. There is not a sound! No answer of any kind!

But, of course, someone will respond: You have to open the book! You have to read it! You have to listen to its message! And I respond, Then it is not *Sola Scriptura*! Then it is the Bible, as examined by whom? By me? By you? By scholars? By the church? As interpreted by what? Historical critical methodologies? Through a particular systematic theological lens? Just trying to be in tune with the Spirit's guidance?

Readers are active participants in the process. They decide which pages to open to, which texts to read, which interpretation of the words to accept, which application to adopt.

To summarize: The first thing *Sola Scriptura* does *not* mean is that the Bible is self-interpreting and that readers have no role to play in the process.

The second thing it does *not* mean is that the Bible is the only valid source of information or guidance that readers are allowed to examine. I once had a student in my Luke class—an "A" student, I might add. My student made an articulate case for a viewpoint that I considered wrong. He acknowledged that in order to interpret Bible texts appropriately people needed to take into account the historical circumstances in which the texts were written and those aspects of culture that shaped what the texts would have meant in that ancient world. But, he insisted, since God knows that readers need this kind of help, God would surely have put into the Bible itself all the background information they need in order to understand the texts properly. So, if cultural background information is in the Bible, use it. If scholars claim to have found background information from other ancient sources, ignore it.

The argument was well presented, but I was convinced then, and am convinced now that it is not valid. Fortunately, that student has also changed his mind. His own present theological work is testimony to the fact that doing so was a good idea!

The fact is that the more readers know about the history and the culture of biblical times, the more accurately they can discern what the texts were designed to say, and the better they can discern which of its instructions apply to the very changed circumstances of their day. The truth of the gospel challenged the culture of its day, and it will challenge contemporary culture, but unless readers understand both cultures (and, of course, accurately discern the core of the gospel!), they will be hard-pressed to discern appropriately when they are actually living the gospel and when they are perpetuating first-century cultural

norms in a twenty-first century world, or Middle Eastern customs in a Western world. A huge aspect of rightly interpreting Scripture is discerning how it addressed its world, so that people can discern how it addresses theirs.

It is precisely by paying attention to this, that readers guard themselves against a whole series of very unbiblical steps, like placing the ancient Christological church creeds, written in their Platonic framework, on a higher plane than the teaching of Scripture itself. Or like defining God with a set of attributes borrowed from Greek philosophy. Or like choosing a particular version of rationalistic evangelical systematic theology and making it a grid through which the Bible is interpreted. Or, for that matter, thinking it is more biblical to wear sandals, or beards, or head coverings than not to.

So, the second thing *Sola Scriptura* does not mean is that the Scriptures are to be interpreted and applied without reference to history and culture. On the contrary, to know the history and culture of Bible times and to discern the cultural forces that have always shaped the church throughout its history and today, no less, is to have at least a fighting chance of avoiding reading texts with all the wrong lenses and therefore hearing all the wrong things.

A third thing *Sola Scriptura* does not mean is that the Confessions of Faith and denominational guidelines should be avoided. On the contrary, they might well capture the collective wisdom of a whole body of disciples of Jesus, aiming together under the guidance of the Spirit to interpret Scripture rightly. But when readers consult these, (and they should), they need to do so with humility and generosity. Guidelines are guidelines...the Bible is God's infallible Word.

What *Sola Scriptura* Means

What then does *Sola Scriptura* mean? Well, it had a very important function when first popularized. It was a valid and important rejection of the official dogma of the institutional church, which had been set up as an authority equal to (and in fact often superior to) the Bible for faith and life. Martin Luther insisted, not "Scripture plus tradition," but "Scripture alone" is the final court of appeal! So the first thing it means is that the final court of appeal must always be the Scriptures, not some magisterium, nor some pope, nor (and now it comes closer to home) some eloquent, persuasive, popular pastor or some best-selling popular author today. People need to read broadly, attend conventions,

present papers, but never get on a bandwagon that claims to have finally gotten theology all figured out. When this happens, the church is ripe for a new reformation.

Second, though it cannot mean that Scripture is self-interpreting, *Sola Scriptura* does challenge interpreters to subject themselves to the texts they are interpreting. Not personal experience nor human reason, but rather God's revealed Word is the standard of truth. My experience shapes my reading; my reasoning is essential if I am going to understand anything; I bring with me many convictions and assumptions; but all of these, experience and reason and convictions and assumptions, must be put in the service of that which stands above them—the texts that I am interpreting. When the convictions I bring with me to a text are not only settled, but hardened in cement before I approach the texts, then I have abandoned faithful Bible reading. The influence of my personal experience, my reasoning ability, even our collective experience and our collective wisdom must always be subjected to what the Bible says.

Third, biblical theology, not systematic theology, is the safest way to discern what God wants to reveal through the Scriptures. Sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously interpreters assume that the correct meaning of a text is whatever meaning can be harmonized with whatever else the Bible says about that topic. Everything is forced to fit into one grid. Everything is rationalized. There is one right answer to every question. It all sounds so reasonable. Only one problem—interpreters have to do a great deal of violence to the texts to make them come out that way. Anyone who believes that the correct interpretation of every single text in Scripture points directly toward a Calvinist-Reformed theological system, is just as likely to be wrong as those who believe that every single text in Scripture points toward an Arminian theological system. *Any* theological system can be made to seem right *because of* some texts and *in spite of some* others. But interpreters dare not let any theological system stand in judgment over what a particular text may be allowed to say. No system should ever be final arbiter on what a text can mean. I believe one of the great strengths of a Mennonite Brethren heritage is to give preference to biblical theology over systematic theology. I also believe that this is one of their strengths that is in serious danger of slipping away.

Fourth, no distinctive personal (or denominational) conviction should ever become so sacrosanct, that interpreters refuse to take seriously those texts that don't obviously support it. Yes, everyone has

convictions. Yes, everyone brings assumptions to their reading. And precisely for that reason, Scripture must always have the power to challenge my belief system. If it does not, I have put my belief system *over* the Scriptures and thus negated the Bible's role as the final standard for faith and life.

Finally, the safest way to free up the Scriptures to actually function as the final authority for faith and life is to apply the broadest possible base for interpreting it. This is what Mennonite Brethren call community hermeneutics. This means valuing the private reading experience of every believer, but also the careful research of Bible teachers. It means listening to and valuing diverse interpretations, as the church still strives for consensus. It means balancing prayer and working hard at the challenges of interpreting texts; balancing spiritual discernment and debating alternatives; balancing convictions that the Bible is a historical book written by many authors in diverse circumstances with convictions that despite this, perhaps because of this, it is also God's divine revelation leading reliably to God's truth—as the church believes and lives what the Bible teaches.

Conclusion

Mennonite Brethren have much to learn from other traditions and from biblical scholars across the globe. But Mennonite Brethren also bring with them strengths that are integral to who they are. These include a conviction that the Bible is their final authority for faith and practice, and a strong focus on the need for the Christian community to discern truth together. If Mennonite Brethren can get past pious slogans and avoid the strictures that narrow theological systems impose on Bible reading, they can be confident that careful study of the Scriptures will bear fruit in terms of insight and faithful discipleship.

Endnotes

1 Sections of this paper are similar to what I have published elsewhere, primarily in a chapter entitled "Hearing God's Word Together," in *Out of the Strange Silence*, ed. Brad Thiessen (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2005), 19-28; and a chapter entitled "God Speaks Through the Bible: Why do we Hear God Dif-

ferently?" in *All Right Now: Finding Consensus on Ethical Questions* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2008), 19-44.

2 "Article 2: Revelation of God," *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000), 23.

Can the Center Hold? Conversion in Canadian Mennonite Brethren Spirituality

Andrew Dyck

Canadians have a deep interest in spirituality, yet often do not expect churches to help them meet their spiritual needs.[1] There is often a mismatch between the spirituality that Canadians seek and the spirituality that churches offer.[2] Some Christians only associate spirituality with contemplatives, mystics and non-Christian religions. In 1998 the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* published its supplementary *Encounter* magazine under the title, "Spirituality: Seeking and Finding."[3] In this issue, spirituality referred mainly to eastern religions, the occult and even the paranormal. However, of the more than thirty-five definitions of spirituality currently in use, many are specific to the Christian faith.[4]

British historian and theologian Philip Sheldrake writes that spirituality "is rooted within the lived experience of God's presence in history."[5] For Christians, such spirituality includes "a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers."[6] American evangelical scholar Evan Howard notes, "spirituality refers to human interaction with the transcendent or divine...specifically...relationship with God through Jesus Christ."[7] He continues, "the academic field of spirituality...reflects systematically on lived *experience* of Christ and the formulations surrounding that experience."[8] In short, spirituality includes encounters with God, talk about that encounter, and activities that contribute to and result from that encounter.

In order for Mennonite Brethren to engage Canadians who are interested in spirituality, it will be valuable for Mennonite Brethren to be familiar with their own spirituality—their particular ways of experiencing God, their descriptions of those experiences and the activities they associate with such experiences. Historically, Mennonite Brethren have said that they experience God through reading and studying

the Scriptures,[9] through gathering for worship,[10] and through personal conversion. In his opening address to the 2010 Mennonite Brethren consultation, "Renewing Identity and Mission," Alfred Neufeld claimed that a central desire of the Mennonite Brethren founders was "to recover the existential dimension of salvation."[11] Mennonite Brethren have consistently considered a personal conversion experience to be at the center of their spirituality. Mennonite Brethren have not, however, held to one fixed understanding of conversion; instead, they have continually adjusted their view of conversion—sometimes appropriating convictions and practices from other groups and sometimes reacting to trends around them. In this chapter I will trace these shifting features of conversion among Mennonite Brethren over the past 150 years, indicating some of the primary influences behind these changes and suggesting how this fluidity might continue developing for the sake of present-day mission.

Three limitations to this chapter need to be identified. One, I will include the experiences of Mennonite Brethren in both Russia and in the United States because of the many ways in which Mennonite Brethren in these countries have influenced Mennonite Brethren in Canada. Two, I will confine myself mainly to the experiences of those Mennonite Brethren with a Dutch-German-Russian background who became English speaking. Three, I will of necessity simply present a few representative accounts and events that illustrate the larger trends in the development of conversion among Mennonite Brethren in Canada.

Conversion was a defining feature of the first Mennonite Brethren in Russia. The secession of eighteen householders from the other Mennonites in 1860 was precipitated by the conviction that communion should be celebrated only by the truly converted.[12] In their secession document, the secessionists indicated their convictions about conversion. True conversion is based on personal volition (a "genuine loving faith") rather than a "memorized" catechism. The Holy Spirit effects real change in a person at conversion. This change must be demonstrated by baptism and by living uprightly instead of decadently. All this is possible because of the convert's intimate union with Jesus (as signified by communion).[13] Furthermore, although not mentioned in the secession document, the conversions of many Mennonite Brethren were intensely emotional experiences. This accorded with the teaching they had received from the German Lutheran pietist Eduard Wuest, who taught that conversion or the "new birth" was a "decisive, overwhelming experience expressing itself in inner joy. It was a dramatic

event accompanied by a deep sense of sin and an intense struggle which climaxed in a lasting sense of salvation assurance."[14] The early Mennonite Brethren immediately began promulgating this life-changing conversion among the other Mennonites, as well as among Germans and Russians who were their neighbors, servants and apprentices.[15]

In June 1865 leaders among the Mennonite Brethren set down a reform document in which they reined in excesses that were bringing disrepute on some of their members.[16] A number of Mennonite Brethren had been expressing their conversions with enthusiastic worship that included shouting, jumping,[17] waltzing "till the sweat goes through their clothes," playing violins and tambourines and speaking in tongues, with burning of Christian religious books, with literalistic interpretations of Scripture, with fisticuffs and excommunications among leaders, and with unnamed improprieties between men and women.[18] Several aspects of the June Reforms marked a turning point for the Mennonite Brethren's practice of conversion. The joyful expressions in worship of the converted were to be more restrained, in accordance with the wider community's norms of propriety (although it would still be acceptable to leap for joy and shout "if that is how we feel" in response to "the Spirit of the Lord moving among us").[19] Of particular importance, the converted must live as Jesus taught in the company of the church.

German Baptists, who influenced the Mennonite Brethren through most of the 1860s, likely introduced or reinforced two practices that became key signs of conversion among Mennonite Brethren: baptism by immersion instead of pouring; and the custom of having each convert give a personal testimony of their conversion experience to the congregation prior to being baptized and accepted as a church member.[20] The Baptists also reinforced the Mennonite Brethren's early zeal for spreading conversion by evangelistic mission both in their own communities and farther afield.

Two decades after the June Reforms, the *Zionsbote*—a German-language publication of American Mennonite Brethren with a circulation that included Canada and Russia—began publishing conversion accounts of Mennonite Brethren adults at the request of editor John F. Harms. Two historians, John B. Toews and Dora Dueck, have analyzed the conversion accounts published between 1890-1900 and 1884-1906.[21] Based on their research, Mennonite Brethren conversions took place in four stages. In the pre-conversion stage, individuals became dissatisfied with their present religious experiences or spirituality. Most people reported that they then entered a stage of becoming

conscious of their own sins and sinfulness. For weeks, months or even years these people wrestled with their sinfulness—repenting, praying, searching the Scriptures or obtaining advice from known Christians.[22] In each person's conversion narrative there came a point in time when the wrestling with sin concluded with a climactic breakthrough of receiving forgiveness of sins and assurance of salvation from God. Waves of ecstatic joy overwhelmed them. "In retrospect all the new believers [looked] upon their conversion as the most momentous event in their lives."[23] Although not specifically identified with "conversion," a fourth stage normally followed, in which the new converts expressed their joy outwardly and realigned their community relationships by being baptized into a Mennonite Brethren congregation. These published conversion stories were permeated by the reading of Scripture, a refreshingly honest, authentic and individualistic tone, the language of pilgrimage or journey (usually portrayed as difficult) and prayer.[24]

As the Mennonite Brethren movement grew, first in Russia and then spreading by immigration and evangelism to the United States and on into Canada, the conversion experiences of the first generation were nurtured and promoted in the lives of succeeding generations through testimonies, hymns and sermons on salvation.[25] In the transmission process, however, Mennonite Brethren—originally a movement of vitality and renewal—risked premature ossification. John B. Toews cautiously suggests that "by celebrating the reality of the new birth and repeatedly recalling the experience of the nineteenth-century Brethren may have restricted and conventionalized their concept of conversion and in the process they may have become more conservative than their founders."[26] A century earlier, historian Peter M. Friesen was bolder. He exclaims that only one year after the June Reforms the Mennonite Brethren Church was becoming "like the *Kleine Gemeinde* (more puritanical in attitude, somewhat melancholic and formalistically-ascetically pious) rather than like the 'Huepfer.'"[27]

The experiences of three Mennonite Brethren leaders in Canada represent three ossifying tendencies in conversion: expected conformity to a normative emotional experience, fixed expectations of the conversion process, and rigidly defined rules for the converted life. Benjamin B. Janz, pastor and conference leader, struggled with his own conversion experience in 1895 because even after repeated confessions, reliance on Isaiah 43:25, and "promises of self-surrender...nothing happened inwardly or outwardly...There was no response from above."[28] Janz did not experience the culminating breakthrough of joy

that, according to the accepted pattern, was supposed to follow immediately upon one's awakening and wrestling.[29] Teacher and school president Abraham H. Unruh, in his 1954 history of the Mennonite Brethren, warned against making a fixed pattern out of conversions that could now take place all in one evening, as was being promoted by North American evangelists, over and against the lengthy process of preaching, prayer and searching the Scriptures that was once the norm.[30] In 1957 Johannes Harder, a pastor and conference leader, sought to resist the worldly influences of Canadian life on immigrant Mennonite Brethren by helping to draft rules (*Regeln*) that could help them live converted lives.[31] These rules (subsequently published and widely distributed only as guidelines [*Richtlinien*]) called for, among other things, a commitment to Bible reading, prayer, family devotions, obedience to church decisions, witnessing, refusing military service and the renunciation of smoking, drinking alcohol, attending theatres and dances, wearing jewellery or cosmetics and marrying an unbeliever.[32]

By the 1950s Canadian Mennonite Brethren were wrestling publicly with the meaning of conversion. Conversion was a frequent topic in *The Voice*, published by the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC), and in the first two study conferences of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren. The difficulties understanding conversion were highlighted in a 1956 article in *The Voice* titled simply "Conversion," and written by MBBC faculty member Henry R. Baerg. After affirming the centrality of conversion for Mennonite Brethren, Baerg attempted to clarify an understanding of conversion, but ended up highlighting its paradoxes and contradictions. He pointed out the danger of stereotyping experience, yet still identified three stages in the conversion experience.[33] He expected the conversion experience to be deeply felt, yet acknowledged that some conversions are emotionally quiet.[34] "The whole experience is the work of the Holy Spirit," yet every Christian must make a voluntary agreement with God.[35] Turning from one's evil ways is a scriptural priority, but the desire to do good works is insufficient without a "personal decision to be a Christian."[36] Baerg criticized the psychology of religion as unable to account for true conversion, yet he appealed to psychology in support of conversions usually occurring among youth and young adults.[37] He expected conversion to include a clear turning point, yet allowed for gradual conversions "after a longer period of preparation and conviction."[38]

Many of these dilemmas became sharply focused around the matter of children's conversions. In contrast to the founding period

in Russia, the majority of Mennonite Brethren were now converting as youth. A survey of more than 1,600 Mennonite Brethren members and attendees in Manitoba in 1957 indicated that the average age at conversion was 13.3 years old.[39] As well, many of the initial efforts by Canadian Mennonite Brethren to evangelize outside their German-Russian ethnic circle targeted children more than adults.[40] Child conversions required a reexamination of many aspects of conversion: the amount of knowledge required, the human evidences of divine regeneration, the appropriate ethical outcomes, emotional expectations, church membership responsibilities, the role of normal child and youth development, and coercion versus free choice.

In the early issues of *The Voice*, and in many of the presentations at those first two study conferences, pastors and teachers offered a variety of responses to these issues. John A. Toews wrote in defense of child conversion, but with the provisos that salvation explanations need to be simplified and that altar calls and fear of hell should not be used with children.[41] I. W. Redekopp observed that although regeneration (which is done by God) happens instantaneously, a child might only come to recognize their conversion gradually over time, and thus may need to turn to Christ many times.[42] V. D. Toews said that one can tell if a child has been converted if they pray, if their prayers are answered and if their whole life is a witness.[43] With respect to viewing conversion as a process, D. Edmond Hiebert allowed for a process leading up to conversion; but he was reluctant to name the convert's ongoing turnings to Christ as "conversion."[44] David Ewert supported the perspective of conversion as an ongoing lifelong process by making a strong case for the inseparability of justification and sanctification.[45] He downplayed the significance of emotional crises by redefining the conversion experience as a "day by day relationship to Christ" in which the believer continually chooses to reign over sin, that is, chooses holy living.[46] Jacob Quiring, by contrast, upheld the emotional dimension of conversion: "a release of emotional tension...will always be a by-product of a good confession. It will inevitably accompany the forgiveness of sins."[47] As for the actions of a converted person, Lando Hiebert pushed for greater strictness in banning non-Christian activities for Mennonite Brethren, even opposing membership in professional societies when they "become a pleasure group."[48] George W. Peters was more gracious, speaking not of prohibitions, but of the positive outcomes to be seen in the converted who are progressively becoming more obedient to Christ.[49] John A. Toews suggested that one must

already be turning away from sinful living before one can be saved;[50] whereas Waldo Hiebert implied that holy living is not a precondition for conversion, but results instead from the "genuine transforming spiritual experience" of having "a personal experience in Christ," of being baptized and of dedicating oneself to follow Christ.[51]

As Mennonite Brethren celebrated their centennial in 1960, they embarked on several decades of self-examination and evaluation—what Abram J. Klassen called a "crisis of the search for identity."[52] During these years, a series of essays by Delbert Wiens from California sparked further reflections on conversion among Mennonite Brethren. In *New Wineskins for Old Wine: A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, Wiens argues that Mennonite Brethren have lost a true experience of conversion: they have replaced experience, maturity and ethical discipleship with talk, rules and witnessing.[53] Stimulated by Wiens' articles, and by the expansion of the Mennonite Brethren beyond its traditional ethnic boundaries, discussions about conversion broadened beyond the conversion of children in two new directions: the conversion of subsequent generations of adult Mennonite Brethren and the conversion of those who did not have a Christian heritage. Such discussions centered primarily around the experiential aspect of conversion and on the ethical outcomes of conversion.[54]

The affective experience of conversion continued to be alternatively highlighted or downplayed. Waldo Hiebert used his 1974 study conference paper, "The Place of Feeling in Christian Experience," to argue that Mennonite Brethren have suppressed emotional experience in conversion and in ongoing Christian life by their cold intellectualism, fear of emotional excesses and legalism.[55] The following year, John A. Toews, in his landmark *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, identified experiential faith and conversion as distinctive of Mennonite Brethren theology, but had little to say about the affective dimensions of that experience.[56] In 1980 Hans Kasdorf, in his insightful book *Christian Conversion in Context*, offered the most detailed and substantial explanation of the affective experience in conversion. He drew on various social sciences to present a schema demonstrating "that Christian conversion does not follow a stereotyped pattern, but may take a variety of forms both personal and multi-personal."[57] In this way, Kasdorf effectively undermined the tendency of Mennonite Brethren to expect conversion to be experienced in only one way, while still upholding the significance of genuine human experience.

The strict ethical descriptions of the converted life were further moderated during these decades. In 1969 Mennonite Brethren delegates passed a resolution stating that henceforth ethical statements would be understood as ideals and guidelines, not as rules or conditions for church membership.[58] In a similar vein, conference resolutions on ethical conduct became very lengthy, often preceded by detailed explanations. Three sociological studies of Mennonite Brethren in the 1970s and 1980s highlighted the discrepancy between Mennonite Brethren's widespread experiences of initial conversion—associated with high scores for devotional life with God and personal moral behaviors—and their low scores on social ethics and concerns.[59] This prompted Mennonite Brethren leaders to place greater emphasis on the need for discipleship and ethical living when speaking about conversion. John A. Toews, for instance, found many occasions to highlight Harold Bender's "Anabaptist Vision" in his history of the Mennonite Brethren.[60]

In 1980 another book was published that addressed conversion. *Conversion: Doorway to Discipleship* is a collection of essays by seven Mennonite Brethren writers, six of whom had lived in Canada. Although the main emphasis of the book is that "if conversion is real, it must be evident in a changed life," one of its particularly new and helpful contributions was the essay by anthropologist Paul Hiebert.[61] Hiebert offered Mennonite Brethren a way of integrating the two dimensions of conversion that were being widely debated at the time: namely, experience and ethical outcomes. Hiebert recommended that rather than understanding conversion as crossing a boundary marked by defining doctrines and changed behaviors (a bounded-set perspective),[62] Mennonite Brethren should understand conversion as changing the direction of one's life towards a center who is Christ (a centered-set perspective).[63] This centered-set perspective highlighted the process or journey aspect that is essential to Christian conversion, and incorporated both the experience of making a life-changing decision and ongoing growth in ethical living and spiritual formation.[64]

After 1980, with its two landmark books on conversion (followed that fall by an issue of *Direction* journal comprising responses to those books), the debates about conversion seemed to abate among Mennonite Brethren.[65] Several conference publications did, however, offer teachings on conversion and conversion testimonials, thereby offering a glimpse into the Mennonite Brethren understanding of conversion in the 1990s. Conversion was presented in several of the topical

teaching pamphlets that the Canadian Board of Faith and Life began publishing in 1993. These generally described conversion as a change in loyalties marked by a decision, commitment or confession of faith.[66] Transformation and living a new life were also central including life in a church community, love and peacemaking.[67] These pamphlets were clear that conversion can be either sudden or gradual.[68] In the words of the pamphlet *DDP: Description of a Discipled Person,* published by the Canadian Board of Christian Education Ministries, a disciple of Jesus is "journey conscious."[69]

The Canadian Conference's Christian Education Ministries also published teaching resources that were designed to help teach children a lifestyle of ongoing conversion. *The Life Steps Plan for Ministries to Children* stated that children's ministries in a local congregation should nourish children spiritually by maintaining a balance between six main "spiritual 'food groups'"[70] In the first of these groups, "Salvation," children should be given "regular opportunities to receive Christ as Saviour and to share their faith story as they have experienced it."[71] Whereas children from non-Christian homes could be expected to respond positively to teaching about Jesus by "[inviting] Jesus to be their Savior" (i.e., conversion with a definite beginning), children from Christian homes would "naturally affiliate with their parents' faith" (i.e., conversion as a process).[72] Significantly, *The Life Steps Plan* insisted that a healthy children's ministry will focus not only on initial conversion, but will also emphasize practicing spiritual disciplines of devotion to God, knowing the Bible, having good relationships in the church, reaching out beyond the local church and serving people in need. These categories correspond to the first five qualities of the *Description of a Discipled Person.* In a similar vein, *First Steps for Kids: Lessons to Help Children Grow More as Christians* seeks to foster a life-long journey consciousness among children aged seven to eleven.[73] After these children have made an initial decision to follow Jesus, *First Steps* offers them four lessons that are meant to help them be assured of their salvation, know God, pray and read the Bible, and belong to a church.

The most recent Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith also speaks about conversion, although it never uses the word "conversion."[74] Instead, the Confession prefers the vocabulary of salvation, saving and Savior. This fits with the Confession's primary emphasis on God's role in conversion. Even the article titled "Salvation" speaks relatively little about the human role in conversion. This shift in emphasis is striking in light of the extensive debates in the previous decades on describing

the human dimension of conversion. The most common words that the Confession does use to describe the human role are "believing" and "believers." The second most frequent words are "disciple," "follower," and "obey"—reinforced by half of the Confession consisting of descriptions of the changed life that is lived by converted persons. Of the three Mennonite Brethren Confessions of Faith, this is the first to mention joy in relation to the new birth.[75] It also uses a great deal of language that reflects the relationship between converted persons and God.

Nothing is said in the Confession of Faith about the conversion of children. The commentary on the Confession, however, encourages Mennonite Brethren to "validate, affirm, and celebrate childhood conversions" because even young children "are spiritually sensitive and can respond to the work of the Spirit in their lives."[76] The commentary reminds its readers that such responses must be voluntary, not a result of the wishes or persuasion of adults. The commentary also counsels that children and youths who have experienced conversion be encouraged to grow in their "obedience to the teachings of Christ, Christian service, and involvement in the local church," even postponing baptism until they "understand what it means to be accountable to the congregation."[77]

Having begun this study with conversion accounts from the *Zionsbote*, it is appropriate to end with more recent conversion accounts. From 1993 through 2002, the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* published two issues a year of *Encounter*, a magazine to "pass...on to someone who might be influenced towards the Christian faith through reading it."[78] In these twenty issues, the editors included more than fifty biographical articles, most of which included descriptions of conversion. In later issues of *Encounter*, Mennonite Brethren were the subjects (and frequently also the authors) of most of these articles. A common theme throughout these biographical articles was the change that a person had experienced as a result of their conversion: for example, changed relationships, changed life habits or joining a church. For many people, knowledge and belief about Jesus and God were central to their conversions, which were typically marked by a specific decision or commitment, or occasionally by a series of decisions or commitments. Frequently, there was a process leading up to that decision, with a process of further changes taking place after the decision, a pattern of process-event-process. There were no stories of persons who simply found themselves being nurtured into faith. These were almost all stories of adult conversions. Of the two child conversion stories, one

turned out to be a conversion that "did not take root."[79] Only some of these biographical articles included descriptions of an emotional experience associated with conversion.[80] There was a great deal of language that spoke of people having a relationship with God as a result of their conversion.

Conversion during the Mennonite Brethren's founding decades in Russia can be characterized by five primary dimensions: a process of *change* culminating in a climactic event indicating one's assurance of salvation; intense *affective experiences* during that process and climax; a *relationship* with God that required realigned *relationships* within the Mennonite community; changed *actions* of public witness, baptism and ethical living; and freely-exercised *volition*.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, when the number of Mennonite Brethren in Canada was increasing, conversion was being understood more rigidly, especially by fixing the pattern of the affective experiences, by gradually reducing or even eliminating the process prior to the conversion event, and by defining the actions of a converted life with mandatory rules.

By mid-century, Mennonite Brethren were wrestling with how to redefine all five dimensions of conversion, especially in light of the conversions of their children. During the "identity crisis" years of the 1960s and 1970s, the conversion experience and its resulting actions were intentionally examined. Experience came to be understood as highly variable in affect and process; leaders urged greater ethical living; and centered-set thinking offered a way to link ethical lifestyle with vital experience.

After 1980 debates about conversion seemed to subside. There seemed to be widespread consensus that many kinds of change are part of conversion. The experience of conversion could be a sudden event or a gradual process, but was usually described as including a point of commitment decision. That volitional event was associated with beliefs based on knowledge. God's role in conversion and humans' relationship with God received greater emphasis than previously. Little attention was given to affect; transformed ways of living continued to be taught; and converts were expected to relate to a church community.

Although this study has not provided a detailed historical analysis of the influences that contributed to these shifts in emphasis, several key influences have been highlighted. During the founding period, an Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage was overlaid with the perspectives of Lutheran pietists and German Baptists. Mennonite Brethren villag-

ers adjusted their conversions both as accommodations to, and reactions against, their broader Mennonite communities. As immigrants to Canada, Mennonite Brethren wrestled with the complications of adjusting to new cultures and communities, and with the "town" influences of modernism (including fundamentalism and evangelicalism). Higher education, charismatic movements, increased evangelistic efforts and a diluting of their ethnic glue also shaped Mennonite Brethren understanding and experience of conversion. Additional historical research into grassroots sources (e.g., personal journals, biographies, articles in the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* and the *Rundschau*, teaching materials, devotional resources, teaching curricula and syllabi) is needed to confirm the trends identified in this paper.

Undoubtedly, conversion continues to be a fluid reality for Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Although Mennonite Brethren continue a vigorous pursuit of church planting, local outreach and cross-cultural mission, the recent absence of discussion about the nature of conversion is puzzling if conversion continues to be at the core of their spirituality. One explanation may be that Mennonite Brethren have settled on a common understanding of conversion. Alternatively, they may have become so diverse in response to various influences that subgroups are free to understand conversion as they see fit. It may even be that conversion is no longer perceived as the center of Mennonite Brethren spirituality.

In my view, Canadians' decreasing church affiliation and increasing attention to spirituality constitute an invitation for Mennonite Brethren to again look seriously at conversion. As already described, Mennonite Brethren have broadened their understandings of conversion during the past several decades, acknowledging that there are many different ways in which God accomplishes conversion and many different ways in which people experience conversion. For the sake of mission, the implications of this broadened understanding need to be explored in at least two ways.

First, having recognized that God is the primary actor in conversion and that much of conversion is a process, Mennonite Brethren would do well to exercise trust and patience in their evangelism methodologies. On the one hand, conversion that is restricted to a human commitment decision in response to right knowledge will be inadequate for many relativistic Canadians. On the other hand, conversion that emphasizes God's role in conversion will likely resonate with Canadians who are more attracted to divine mystery than to institutions'

rules for living. Furthermore, because conversion can be a gradual journey instead of a sudden crisis, Mennonite Brethren can develop ways of becoming patient companions and co-travelers with their Canadian neighbors, helping them notice ways in which the Holy Spirit is already calling them into a relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

Second, Mennonite Brethren still need to integrate emotional experience with conversion in ways that engage the entire person. The conversion stories in Schmidt's book and the *Encounter* magazines suggest that although Mennonite Brethren continue to describe conversion in terms of changed lifestyle, voluntary commitment and renewed relationships, the place of affective experience in conversion is uncertain or even ignored. Few published accounts and teachings address the emotions of a person being converted by God. This lacuna is striking in light of the central role that emotional experiences played in the early Mennonite Brethren conversions, and in light of the efforts of later Mennonite Brethren teachers to integrate the affective dimension of conversion experiences. Canadians who want to experience reality fully need to be offered a conversion journey that offers a vital experience of God that touches all the dimensions of human experience including the affect.

Throughout their history, Mennonite Brethren have looked to other denominations and bodies of knowledge for help in understanding conversion in ways that are faithful both to Scripture and experience. Christian traditions that link a life of contemplative awareness of God with a life of participation in God's mission can help Mennonite Brethren integrate trusting patience and emotional vitality with the mission of extending to Canadians God's offer of lifelong conversion. The brothers of the Taizé Community in France, for instance, model a joyful and patient attentiveness to God's transforming work as they pray, sing and study the scriptures with young visitors and with people in hardship around the world.[81] The ancient practice of spiritual direction offers an attentive posture for patient evangelism.[82] The practical guidance of the sixteenth-century *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola offers a way of recognizing God's converting influence by discerning a person's inner affective movements.[83] By learning from the convictions and practices of other believers such as these, Mennonite Brethren may be able not only to recapture for themselves the depth of vital experience with God that was familiar to their founders, but also to offer other Canadians that kind of life-changing experience. Such a conversion would surely be a center that can hold.

Endnotes

1 Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002), 183-184. See Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 14-15.

2 Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 199.

3 In *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 9, 1998. *Encounter* was included inside the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* in order to be shared with non-churchgoers as a pre-evangelism tool.

4 Bernard McGinn, "The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, eds. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 29.

5 Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 41.

6 Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 60.

7 Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 16.

8 Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 13 (emphasis added).

9 See "The Evangelical Freedom in the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Canada (The Board of Reference and Council - 1950)," in *Another Look at the Mennonite Brethren*, ed. Henry Brucks (Winnipeg: Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1983).

10 Note hymns such as "Gott ist gegenwärtig!" in *Gesangbuch Der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1952).

11 Alfred Neufeld, "Recovering Mennonite Brethren Apostolic and Prophetic Origins and Identity," Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches Web site, Adobe Flash Player audio file, 6:43, http://www.mbconf.ca/home/media_centre/index.cfm?pageID=74&videoID=76&videoSection=3&videoSearch=&videoSort=custom&videoPage=1&ts=undefined&yOffset=0 (accessed August 11, 2010).

12 Peter. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen, Harry Loewen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 228.

13 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 230-232.

14 John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren and Conversion," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993): 82.

15 John B. Toews, "Early Mennonite Brethren and Evangelism in Russia," *Direction* 28, no. 2 (1999): 194. This impulse for Christian mission has been a long-standing and distinguishing mark of evangelicals because of their confidence that experiencing assurance of salvation is "normal, indeed normative, for the believer." David W. Bebbington, "Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment," *Crux* 25, no. 4 (1989): 32. Assurance of salvation and evangelistic mission may also have been key features that distinguished the early Mennonite Brethren from their fellow Mennonites: see Bruce L. Guenther, "A Road Less-

Travelled: The Evangelical Path of Kanadier Mennonites Who Returned to Canada," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22, no. (2004): 148, 156.

16 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 436-441.

17 They therefore became known as *Huepfer* (jumpers).

18 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 208, 435, 440; John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, ed. Abram J. Klassen (Fresno: The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 60; John B. Toews, "Patterns of Piety among the Early Brethren (1860-1900)," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 12 (1994): 141; J. B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 11; Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*,, 271-272; and John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren: Some Outside Views," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 2 (1984): 88.

19 Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*,, 436-441.

20 Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 26, 1965, 9. Adrian writes that Benjamin B. Janz attributed to the Baptists the dual emphasis on personal testimony and personal conversion experience; Adrian does not, however, cite his source for Janz's claim.

21 See John B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Founders Relate Their Conversion," *Direction* 23, no. 2 (1994): 31-37; and Dora Dueck, "Print, Text, Community: A Study of Communication in the *Zionsbote*, a Mennonite Weekly, between 1884 and 1906" (M.A. thesis, Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, 2001).

22 Toews, "Early and Conversion," 86.

23 Toews, "Early and Conversion," 91.

24 Toews, "Early and Conversion," 82; see Dueck, "Print, Text, Community," 76; Toews, "Early and Conversion," 77; and Dueck, "Print, Text, Community," 45.

25 Toews, "Patterns of Piety," 140.

26 Toews, "Early and Conversion," 92.

27 Friesen, 443.

28 B. B. Janz Papers, *Meine Heimkehr* (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba), 8-9; quoted in Toews, "Early and Conversion," 87.

29 Janz did not experience that overwhelming flood of emotion and "boundless happiness" until later, when he "came forward" after a sermon and "acknowledged his Saviour in a personal prayer and thanked Him out of the depths of being." B. B. Janz Papers, *Meine Heimkehr* (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba), 10; quoted in Toews, "Early and Conversion," 87.

30 A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte Der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro: The General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1954), 832.

31 T. D. Regehr, *A Generation of Vigilance: The Lives & Work of Johannes and Tina Harder* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2009), 299.

32 *Biblische Richtlinien fuer den Christlichen Lebenswandel in der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde/Scriptural Principles for the Christian Life in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Winnipeg: Das Fuersorgekomitee der Kanadischen Konferenz der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde, 1957); quoted in Regehr, *A Generation of Vigilance*, 202-203.

33 Henry R. Baerg, "Conversion," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 5, no. 5 (1956): 5,7.
34 Baerg, "Conversion," 6, 8.
35 Baerg, "Conversion," 6, 7.
36 Baerg, "Conversion," 5, 8.
37 Baerg, "Conversion," 6, 7.
38 Baerg, "Conversion," 7-8.
39 *Minutes of the Provincial Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba*, (Winkler, 1957), 22.
40 Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 50.
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43 V. D. Toews, "Aussprache Und Prüfung Bei Unseren Tauffesten," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 6, no. 4 (1957): 9.
44 D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Experience of Salvation as Viewed from the Standpoint of Conversion and Regeneration," in *Doctrinal Issues Study Conference (General Conference: Board of Reference and Counsel)* (Denver: 1958), 5.
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46 David Ewert, "Union with Christ: The Secret of Sanctification (Continued)," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 3, no. 4 (1954): 5.
47 J. H. Quiring, "On Confession (Part 1)," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 3, no. 1 (1954): 13-14.
48 Lando Hiebert, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Separated Life," in *Doctrinal Issues Study Conference (General Conference: Board of Reference and Counsel)* (Winnipeg: 1956), 3.
49 G. W. Peters, "The Spirit-Filled Life," in *Doctrinal Issues Study Conference (General Conference: Board of Reference and Counsel)* (Winnipeg: 1956), 2.
50 John A. Toews, "Unsound Techniques in Modern Evangelism," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 3, no. 6 (1954): 153.
51 Waldo D. Hiebert, "The Scriptural Definition of the Nature of the Church" (Denver: 1958), 3. Hiebert, an American, is included in this paper because of his influence on the many Canadian Mennonite Brethren pastors who studied under him during the decades that he taught at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (MBBS) in Fresno, California. This paper, presented at a study conference of the General Conference, was intended for both Americans and Canadians. Interestingly, as Mennonite Brethren educational levels increased and broadened, their writings on conversion increasingly referred to perspectives from the social sciences, and especially psychology. (The influential pastor, speaker and educator Frank C. Peters completed a PhD in Psychology in 1959, while he was a faculty member of MBBC.) By the 1950s many writers argued, for instance, for a holistic view of conversion that affected a person's mind, will

and emotions. See A. H. Unruh, "Das Denken, Wollen Und Fühlen Im Religiösen Leben," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* 3, no. 4 (1954), 7-9.

52 Abram J. Klassen, "Introduction," in John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, ed. Abram J. Klassen (Fresno: The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), vii.

53 Delbert Wiens, *New Wineskins for Old Wine : A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1965), 23, 9, 10-11.

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55 Waldo D. Hiebert, "The Place of Feeling in Christian Experience," in *Church, the Word and the World: Study Conference (General Conference: Board of Reference and Counsel)* (Clearbrook: 1974), 19.

56 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 369.

57 Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), 14.

58 *Yearbook 51st Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches Convening at Vancouver British Columbia August 23-26, 1969: Reports for the Year 1966-1969*, (Winnipeg, 1969), 13-14.

59 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later—a Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1975), 87. See pages 98 and 302 where the authors use the term "devotionalism" to include private prayer, mealtime grace, private Bible study, feeling close to God, and asking God's help in times of decisions. Under the heading moral behaviors, the authors included using alcohol, smoking, attending movies, sexual activities outside of heterosexual marriage, gambling, dancing, reckless driving and income tax evasion; Kauffman and Harder, *Anabaptists*,125. A decade later, moral behaviors were seen to be declining among Mennonite Brethren; see Al Dueck, J. B. Toews, and Abram G. Konrad, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 1972-1982, Chapter 2," *Direction* 14, no. 2 (1985): 22. Social ethics included pacifism, race relations, welfare attitudes, anti-communism, labor unions and capital punishment; Kauffman and Harder, *Anabaptists*,149, 302. See also J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1991), 223.

60 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 367; see also 4, 11, 12, 343.

61 Henry J. Schmidt, "Conversion Means Radical Change," in *Conversion: Doorway to Discipleship*, ed. Henry J. Schmidt (Hillsboro: The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), 2.

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63 Hiebert, "Conversion in Cross-Cultural Perspective," 96.
64 Hiebert, "Conversion in Cross-Cultural Perspective," 97.
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66 Raymond O. Bystrom, "Baptism and Church Membership: A Converted and Baptized People" (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, 2000); Harold Jantz, "Mennonite Brethren: Tell Me About Them" (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, 2000); Gordon Nickel, "Christian Witness in a World of Many Faiths" (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, 2002); and John H. Redekop, "Anabaptism: The Basic Beliefs" (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, 1993).
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69 *DDP: Description of a Discipled Person* (Winnipeg: Christian Education Ministries, Mennonite Brethren Conference, 1996). Journey consciousness is the sixth and final description in the DDP.
70 *Life Steps: Developing Spiritually Nourished Children; Plan Outline* (Winnipeg: Chrisitan Education Ministries, 1996), 4.
71 *Life Steps*, 4.
72 *Life Steps*, 4.
73 Lorraine M. Dick, *First Steps for Kids: Lessons to Help Children Grow More as Christians; Teacher's Guide* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995), 4. See also Lorraine M. Dick, *First Steps for Kids: Lessons to Help Children Grow More as Christians; Student Guide* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995).
74 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg: Board of Faith and Life and Board of Resource Ministries General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999). The previous Confession of Faith did not either. See *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1976).
75 *Confession 1999*, 8. See also *Confession of Faith of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America (American Edition)* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1917).
76 *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000), 62-63.
77 *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application*, 63. The commentary goes on to affirm with Menno Simons "the salvation of children [under the age of accountability] who die before they are able to make a conscious choice for Christ," 65.
78 Ron Geddert, "Something New: Editorial," *Encounter* #1, in *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 2, 1993, 8.
79 Sharon Kemp-Allan, "I Finally Found What Had Been Missing," Encounter #20, *Mennonite Brethren Herald* August 23, 2002, 8.

80 Schmidt's book in 1980 similarly interspersed conversion stories in-between each chapter. Although emotional experiences were downplayed in the essays, several of the stories included accounts of emotions being a part of conversion.

81 See "Taizé," Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, http://www.taize.fr/en (accessed June 7, 2011).

82 See Ben Campbell Johnson, *Speaking of God: Evangelism as Initial Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991).

83 See George E. Ganss, S.J., ed., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

Radical Ecclesiology for Local Churches: Reflections from a Colombian Mennonite Brethren Perspective[1]

César Garcia

"Those who ignore what has happened in the world before they were born are always like children." - Cicero

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were known as radicals because of their desire to return to the roots of the Christian faith. "Radical ecclesiology" refers to the search for the origins and roots of the church as revealed in the New Testament and to the faith of the early church as understood by the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement. This chapter will seek to determine whether there is any difference between Protestant evangelical ecclesiology and Anabaptist ecclesiology. Furthermore, given the recent reforms in Roman Catholic worship, is there any difference between Roman Catholic ecclesiology and Anabaptist ecclesiology?

The world today is what some have called a "global village." Radio, television, the internet and the media have caused a general explosion of world concepts.[2] In the particular case of Latin America, almost every worldview is represented. It is now common to see Marxists, agnostics, pre-modernists, modernists, postmodernists, people of faith, atheists and people of many other ideological trends. The world has adopted absolute relativism where there are neither norms nor fixed boundaries, where relative truths are given and absolute truth does not exist, and where tolerance is confused with the acceptance of the validity of all ideas.

Unfortunately, the Christian faith has not escaped this process. Religious syncretism has penetrated contemporary expressions of Christianity. Changes in Roman Catholicism and its ecclesiological imitation of Protestantism in its different forms have made it almost

impossible to define what Anabaptist distinctives are and how they can enrich other denominations. The historic identity crisis experienced by Mennonite Brethren does not help.[3] Due to the blend of Anabaptist, pietist and evangelical theologies in Mennonite Brethren origins and history, it has not been easy for Mennonite Brethren in Latin America to find an authentic flavor.[4]

Individualism marked by the search for sensationalism, feeling and consumerism is another feature of contemporary Latin America. A culture jointly shaped by the forces of modernism and consumerism centered around personal realization, spontaneity and pleasure has been established; hedonism has become axiomatic with contemporary Latin culture.[5] This process has also influenced religion. Today, people patronize the "supermarket of faith" in which the "client" chooses from a range of churches for the church that best matches their necessities. In the words of French philosopher Giles Lipovetsky, "Somebody could be a believer, but like *a la carte*, some dogma is maintained, others are eliminated, and the Gospels are mixed with the Qur'an, Zen or Buddhism. Spirituality is situated on the kaleidoscopic age of supermarket and self-service."[6] This reality has pressured Mennonite Brethren to copy the worship practices, strategies and methodologies of other "successful" Christian movements even if it sacrifices Anabaptist principles. As Stuart Murray points out, "Many Mennonites seem more interested in purpose-driven churches or the Alpha course" than in their Anabaptist tradition.[7]

The temptation to adapt the Mennonite Brethren concept and practices of the church to trends of the time is not new. As has often been said, "He or she who does not know history is destined to repeat it." It is for this reason that Mennonite Brethren should evaluate their ecclesiology, considering how their Anabaptist ancestors may view this present age. José Ortega y Gasset states, "each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors like acrobats in a vast human pyramid."[8] It is not necessary to not "reinvent the wheel," or to form a new ecclesiology. A review of the history that values the insights of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists has much to offer the Latin American Church of the twenty-first century.

What do Mennonite Brethren Understand by the Church

When Mennonite Brethren define the church according to its *function*, two tendencies can be observed, both coming from the An-

glo-Saxon world. The first tendency came to Latin America through dispensationalism. John Driver explains how "for many Christians of this tradition the reason for the church is practically limited to the announcement of the good news of the Gospel."[9] The second tendency, opposite to the first, conceives of the church as an instrument for service and change in the world. However, by emphasizing function in both cases, the importance of the church in itself is minimized. As noted by the Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, "To conceive the Church as purely functional in her mission is not acceptable...The mission of the Church is based on her communion with the Lord, just as it is also among the interrelation between her members."[10] According to some historians the heart of the Mennonite Brethren Church's identity crisis has been the inability to integrate the evangelistic and service functions of the church. However, some Mennonites believe that the rediscovery of a distinctive past offers them opportunity to escape the ideological impasse proposed by the above two tendencies.[11]

The Anabaptists conceived of church in terms of the anticipation of the coming kingdom instead of in functional terms. This can be seen when analyzing the Anabaptist writings that accepted a New Testament dualism in which Christian values are placed in contrast to worldly ones.[12] The Hutterite *Article Book* states:

> Between the Christians and the world there exists a vast difference like that between heaven and earth. The world is the world, always remains the world, behaves like the world and all the world is nothing but world. The Christian, on the other hand, has been called away from the world. He has been called never to conform to the world, never to be a consort, never to run along with the crowd of the world and never to pull its yoke.[13]

So, without forgetting the importance of the mission of evangelism and social service, Driver highlights that "the Church not only proclaims the Kingdom of God, but also *is the community of the Kingdom, an anticipation* (modest but authentic) *of the Kingdom*."[14] Therefore, Mennonite Brethren ecclesiology must reveal the kingdom they proclaim, and its expression must result in, among many other things, a biblical, discipling, liturgical and peacemaking community.

A Biblical Community

A biblical community refers to the way that Anabaptist churches today apply principles from their sixteenth-century spiritual ancestors in their approach to Scripture. Driver condenses these points in the following paragraph:

> *It is not the responsibility of the cleric, as such, nor of the individual, to be interpreters of the Bible, but it is a task for the church as a community of faith and obedience.* What characterized the Anabaptists' focus on biblical interpretation was their conversion experience to Christ. For this reason they insisted that the reading and interpretation of the Bible needed to be Christ centered in a *practical and existential* way within the community of disciples. The living Christ, experienced in the life of the believers, and the Christ that spoke to them through the Sacred Word, were in mutual agreement.[15]

It was significant for Anabaptists to interpret the Bible in two ways: communally and existentially.

First, biblical interpretation was *communal* because, according to Driver, "in all the radical reformation movements studying the Bible as a group held a very important place."[16] The entire congregation participated in the process of biblical interpretation without invalidating the role of teacher or prophet, but limiting the scope of their function.[17]

This way of understanding the Scriptures separates Mennonite Brethren from some of the Latin American Catholic, Protestant and evangelical churches where the interpretation of the Bible rests on the expert who stands before the congregation to impart the knowledge that God has given, and whose teachings, therefore, must never be questioned.[18] Even the formality with which the sermon or homily is presented, based mostly on the Greek oratorical patterns, prevents the community from fully participating in interpretation and from arriving at a united model of relevant application.

It is imperative that Mennonite Brethren establish preaching models that facilitate the participation of *all* members in the interpretation of the sacred text.[19] It is important to rediscover the simplicity and informality (including the priesthood of all believers) that their historic ancestors found in the New Testament church!

Second, biblical interpretation was *existential* for the early Anabaptists as they asked themselves two questions of the text: 1) What does the Word say? 2) How can it be put into practice?[20] Many Protestants and evangelicals frequently talk of the importance of healthy doctrine as the mark of the true believer. However, Anabaptists go a step further by affirming that "the right biblical interpretation is not so much a question of information, but of repentance and being willing to submit to Christ and to our brothers and sisters within the community of his disciples."[21]

This emphasis on biblical obedience leads to some important implications. The now well-worn debate between liberalism and fundamentalism regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures was not a relevant concern for the early Anabaptists. The radical church of the sixteenth century did not stop to examine which texts had to be accepted and which not. Rather, the most important issue was how to obey the Bible. Walter Klaassen writes, "They were a biblical people, but not 'fundamentalists.' They reflected on the function of the Bible but were not 'liberals.' They were most concerned, not with the intellectual questions, but with humble obedience to Jesus to whom the Scriptures testify."[22]

This acceptance of the Scripture in its totality and the emphasis on how to live it out in daily life was what helped Anabaptists proclaim a vision of a holistic Christianity. This vision needs to be reclaimed for contemporary society. As Pablo Deiros affirms, "The Latin American needs holistic evangelization, with a whole gospel, for the whole person."[23]

There are various trends in the Christian community in Latin America that have prevented the practice of a whole gospel for the whole person. One of these is the ongoing influence of the pietistic movement. Although in its beginning it was an important and necessary movement of renewal in Europe, in Latin America modern pietism has stressed Latin American individualism. Deiros comments, "The Pietistic tendency has carried us to subjectivism and emotionalism...to develop moral legalistic codes...to a devaluing of Christian traditions."[24] Only a whole gospel, centered around following Jesus, keeps the church from subjectivism by providing a firm foundation by which it can judge its emotions and Christian walk. Only a whole gospel frees the church from legalism by questioning the traditions that do not have a biblical base and by accepting those that have it.

Another trend that is not based upon a whole gospel centered around Jesus is fundamentalism. This stems from a dualistic worldview that concerns itself with the verbal proclamation of the gospel as its only objective and priority.[25] Deiros explains,

> The false dualistic distinction between the material and the spiritual, body and soul, earthly life and eternal life, is characteristic of evangelical preaching in many churches. This has led to a concept of an indifferent and distant gospel not concerned with the immediate needs of the people. It has even produced an inhumane gospel that denies as heretical or worldly any demand for social justice.[26]

This movement has been dubbed "native Pentecostalism," which, with its emphasis on healing, deliverance and prosperity, is one of the most notable phenomena among Protestant evangelicals today.[27]

The Pentecostal-fundamentalist mix has reduced the impact of Scriptures by limiting the gospel to certain areas of human experience. Instead of compartmentalizing the gospel, René Padilla affirms that "nothing which affects man and history is exempt from the necessity and the possibility of submission to Christ, and therefore, *nothing* is outside the orbit of Christian mission interest."[28] Mission, which is based on a whole gospel centered around Jesus, will take into account several factors including: the history and the present reality both of the community and the individual; everyday values transmitted through mass communication; worldviews portrayed in society, science and art; problems of the family such as machismo, sexual abuse, alcoholism and drug addiction; the environment and humanity's interaction with it; and social, psychological and political conflicts.[29]

These factors demand pastoral leadership that disciples the individual within one's family context (biblical counseling and doctrine), that provides for the needs of the community (social work and community development), and that produces change in human behavior (worldview, relationship with the environment and responsible political involvement). Karl Müller highlights, "From its beginning, the gospel was a gospel of love and giving help, and no one ever thought to establish rivalry between proclamation of the good news and the presence of love."[30]

A Discipling Community

A discipling community is one that recognizes the importance of following Jesus and being conscious of what his demands imply for its life. Commitment and privileges are acquired and nourished within the local church once a person has decided to identify with the congregation and participate in a Christian lifestyle of service to others. Unfortunately, these dimensions have been lost in many congregations in the rush to grow numerically. Evangelism in Latin America has been, according to Deiros, "a gospel of special offers and not a gospel of discipleship and obedience."[31]

It is common to hear preachers give invitations to receive Christ using terms that are sometimes hedonistic, with anthropocentric language, which offers the personal gratification sought by many today. The goal of such invitations is to see multitudes pray "the prayer of faith" without stopping to think whether the potential believer has understood what it actually means to follow Jesus. This kind of evangelism is the type that says, "confess and receive," or "repeat after me and be saved."The words of Anabaptists such as Peter Riedman (1542) are relevant to this present context. He said, "Faith is not the empty illusion that those men think...that Christianity is in words only, and therefore hold and regard each and all as Christians, no matter how they live, if they but confess Christ with the mouth."[32]

The method of evangelism used must communicate to every possible convert that they need to take sufficient time to understand clearly what it means to follow Jesus. As Christ warned, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). The church's concern should not merely be to make converts, but rather to make disciples.

Another tendency in Latin America is emphasizing a personal relationship with Christ to the point where the most important thing is to be at peace with God. This way of understanding what it means to follow Christ is the inheritance of pietism, and, according to Deiros, it idealizes the Christian life in "individualistic terms, emphasizing the personal experience of the Christian and his obedience as an individual before God's mandates."[33] While it is true that a personal experience with God is fundamental, the formation of a biblical concept of commitment with the new family of God, through the discipleship learned by following Jesus in community, is also required. The Scrip-

tures do not often describe a Christian as an exclusive solitary body, and it refers to the "body" most often as the inclusive body of believers in Christ. Friedmann affirms,

> In Anabaptism, finally, the answer is a combination of a vertical with a horizontal relationship. Here the thesis is accepted that *man cannot come to God except together with his brother*. In other words, the brother, the neighbor, constitutes an essential element of one's personal redemption. For the disciple there is no such thing as an isolated Christian in his lonely cell. To him brotherhood is not merely an ethical adjunct to Christian theological thinking but an integral condition for any genuine restoration of God's image in man (which after all is the deepest meaning of redemption).[34]

Each Mennonite Brethren member must understand that commitment to God implies commitment to his body, to the church. No one can be a true Christian if there is not the willingness to help others and at the same time to receive help from others in seeking Jesus. Ulrich Stadler stated, "If…each member withholds assistance from the other, the whole thing must go to pieces."[35]

In certain mega churches one sees evidence of what is described by Padilla: "It is a known fact that the goal of missions is to 'save souls' and form churches made up of individuals."[36] It is among these kinds of groups where people often don't even know the name of the brother or sister at their side (much less their needs). It is necessary to embrace a much more Christological pattern of what discipleship in community actually means.

A Liturgical Community

A liturgical community is one that recognizes the importance of worship in community by organizing worship services in which everyone has the possibility of participating and edifying others. A worship service needs to be more than one mouth speaking to many ears, which is the tradition that has infiltrated many Mennonite Brethren churches.

One factor that has influenced the socio-political history of the Latin American people is authoritarianism and autocratic leadership.[37]

The tendency of following a leader "religiously" translates into clericalism. Driver speaks of the exclusive functions of the person who represents God, "It is hoped that the 'religious professional' will bless or sanctify the life of the society or individual in some way...he is called upon to offer prayers and blessings in public events."[38] The religious leader possesses a special quality that permits him to exercise spiritual function that a lay person is not called to do.[39] Anthropologist Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda comments that the priest is consulted because it is believed that there are magical traits tied to the priestly image.[40] Unfortunately, this tendency also has penetrated the Protestant church. Taylor writes,

> This characteristic is very visible among evangelical leaders, whether on a small scale in a little church, in the mega churches of the large cities, in the denominational bureaucracies, in the various para-ecclesiastical organizations, or other ministries. The concentration and abuse of personal power among Latin evangelicals simply reflects the larger secular society, for most of them have not seen the biblical servant-leader modeled.[41]

The use of terms such as cleric, religious professional or full-time minister in many churches creates a specialized leadership, which constitutes the one voice that ministers to the entire community of faith, making it almost impossible for each believer to edify others and thereby exercise a true universal priesthood. As long as there is only one leader or a group of leaders, everything remains the same. Deiros explains, "Individualism also finds expression in the Pentecostal understanding of the Christian faith. In many Pentecostal churches, one finds within the ecclesiastic structure a group of men or one strong personality that dominates the congregation."[42]

Some Protestants in Colombia debate whether they should have a traditional liturgy with an emphasis on foreign hymns or resort to contemporary music and more emotional expressions. The early Anabaptists proposed a worship style that was more informal and participatory. Leopold Scharnschlager stated, "One person after another should be allowed to speak."[43] Walter Klaassen states, "what is especially striking [among early Anabaptists] is the rejection of the preacher's monologue and an uncompromising emphasis on congregational participation."[44]

As long as Mennonite Brethren continue having churches that are *pastor centered* or *praise team centered*, they will not have strong communities that grow together. John H. Yoder claims, "In the New Testament...we find...several types of leadership, exercised by several types of qualified persons, each clearly identified. It is the mono-pastoral pattern which stifles the growth of leadership."[45]

Sebastián Rodríguez suggests that churches should return to the practice that was quite normal in the worship gatherings of the Mennonites, where individuals would respectfully interrupt and ask questions or express disagreement with a teaching.[46] Mennonite Brethren need to return to a time for testimonies, to Bible study in groups, to exercising different gifts, to prayer and concrete petitions from different people, to commentaries and reflections of the exposition, to participatory praise, to the use of art and symbols, and to all that facilitates the words of the Apostle Paul, "What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26).

According to Friedmann, two characteristics are necessary to be an Anabaptist church that agrees with the churches of the sixteenth century: (1) There should be no spiritual distinction between lay members and preachers, for all are of "one priestly nation" (1 Pet. 2:5,9); and (2) There should be no distinction between secular and sacred work, the plowing of the fields or assembling for worship, for all areas of life in principle are sanctified and transfigured within this church. All of life is one great service of God and surrender to God.[47]

Driver says that putting an end to clericalism as it exists is part of the saving work of Jesus Christ.[48] This does not imply that congregations should not have leaders. It implies that the structure of leadership has to be different from the secular models that facilitate authoritarianism and that the process of making decisions has to be consultative.[49] Driver continues, "In the large diversity of gifts, some fall into the category that we call leadership and others are helpers. But all contribute to growth and edification in love."[50]

A Peaceful Community

The inadequate manner of dealing with conflict within Christianity has a long history. The South American continent has not been free of violence on the part of Christians. Juana B. de Bucana details the

acts of violence between Catholics and Protestants in Colombia.[51] It is common to speak of pacifism in Latin America, and even more so with the Anabaptists. But what does it mean to be peacemakers in the internal life of the church?

The vision of social change, which characterized the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, required a radical change from beneath through the voluntary creation of a new kind of social group.[52] Anabaptists sought to live in peace in each local community before taking that experience to their secular society, which was outside "the perfection of Christ." To live peacefully within the church has to do principally with *conflict resolution*. However, Cornelius Dyck describes how in the early years the Anabaptists struggled with divisions and strife about doctrine and personal rivalry.[53] The Anabaptists have not always had a good record when it comes to conflict resolution. The Mennonite Brethren Conference in Colombia has already experienced conflict and division in its history.[54]

It is very important to address the theme of conflict resolution within Mennonite Brethren communities today because the major internal problems that exist in their congregations do not reflect the biblical God of love and peace. As Murray states, "Putting our own houses in order is essential if we are to address conflict in other contexts with integrity."[55] For example, there are many ministerial teams that have been damaged because of interpersonal conflicts. Guillermo Taylor claims, "the principle causes of missionary fallout are attributed to the issues of character and spirituality, bad relationships and interpersonal conflict."[56] Studies done by Jonathan Lewis, which analyzed the reasons for missionary dropout, show how interpersonal problems within a missionary team are listed as the sixth among twenty-five reasons why missionaries leave the field.[57]

Menno Simons says, "If he [a servant of the Lord] is to instruct in meekness those that oppose, how can he destroy them?"[58] The destructive attitude that is so often criticized in state governments is also sometimes present in relationships among sisters and brothers in the church. Mennonite Brethren leaders must teach how to resolve conflicts using biblical principles in order to be communities that truly anticipate the kingdom of Christ.

In addition to managing conflict between brothers and sisters in the church, it is necessary to carry this teaching into family life. According to Gutiérrez de Pineda, "The family as an institution is the place from which all the community's institutions are projected. This

institution more than others, influences the incidents of social and cultural evolution and the problems of social disease, and therefore is the critical point for change in society."[59] If believers know how to be peacemakers in the way conflict is managed within families and congregations, then real change will be initiated from beneath, impacting the rest of society. Thomas Finger claims that Anabaptists can make an important contribution "by gently insisting that true community simply does involve commitments, limitations and accountability."[60]

Such a change will have to deal with the *lack of memory* that is part of Colombian people. *Colombia se derrumba y nosotros de rumba*, is the phrase that explains this reality; "Colombia is collapsing and we're partying." Music, sports, soap operas, beauty pageants and festivals are ways by which Colombian people try to avoid the cruel reality of violence and war.[61] Memory of murders and massacres is a burden too heavy for Colombian society. In a postmodern society, "to remember" the injustice and suffering of people is something that is hard to do. Rather, they would enjoy the moment and live the present. Yet one cannot forget that Colombia is a leader in statistics on violence.[62] Colombians want to forget the 4.5 million displaced people and the 3,000 kidnapped people in their country. But if they do this, as some evangelicals Protestants do in their search for feelings of relief, the peace of Jesus that is possible through forgiveness and reconciliation will never be a reality.

Johann Baptist Metz affirms, "'Remembering' has its central and theologically foundational significance in the form it takes as a 'solidarity looking back.' It is a memorative solidarity with the dead and the vanquished."[63] In order to be a relevant church in the Latin American context, Mennonite Brethren are called to be a peaceful community that emphasizes memory. As exemplified by the early Anabaptists, Mennonite Brethren need to help Colombians remember the tragedies of murders and injustice.[64] Reconciliation requires recognition of the past in order to forgive and bring healing.

Conclusion

The trends within Christianity in Latin America today are many and varied. Only a historical and theological analysis can free the Mennonite Brethren from following the latest ecclesiological trends, the influences and ways of thought that are far from the Anabaptist tradition.[65] It is important to maintain a Mennonite Brethren identity,

not because they consider themselves the only true church, but rather because with their emphases they can enrich other Christian communities that seek to live out a New Testament faith.[66] The following words by Juan Mateos are instructive for becoming a biblical, discipling, liturgical and peacemaking community:

> A community is created where there are
> not some above, and others below
> but where everyone is last and all are first (Matthew 19:30):
> all are brothers of one Father, servants of one Lord,
> disciples of one Master,
> the poor whose riches and security
> is God Himself (Matthew 6:19-21);
> where there is neither mine nor yours (Acts 4:32),
> a group of complete joy (John15:11; 16:24),
> of mutual affection (Romans 12:10; Colossians 3:12),
> of easy and continuous forgiveness
> (Matthew 18:21-22; Colossians 3:13);
> where there are no rivalries or parties,
> but instead all are united through love
> (Colossians 3:14) and mutual help (Matthew 5:7);
> where each one lends a hand to carry
> the burdens of the rest (Galatians 6:2),
> the qualities and gifts of each one
> are placed at the service of others
> (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-13)
> where authority means better service
> and never superiority (Luke 22:26-27).[67]

Endnotes

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Discernment in the Local Church: What Our Congregational Discussion on Women in Ministry Leadership Taught Us about the Anabaptist Practice of Community Hermenutics

Brad Sumner and Keith Reed

Repristinating the Practice of Community Hermeneutic

As Christ followers, we continually seek to hear what God is saying to us. Five hundred years ago, our Anabaptist ancestors determined four ways that they could discern the will of God: through Scripture, through the life of Christ, through the voice of the Holy Spirit who resides in each believer and through the discerning community of faith. Mennonite Brethren have perhaps understood and practiced this fourth pathway of congregationally-rooted discernment infrequently and imperfectly. But it is our hope that when it comes to multi-faceted questions of theology and praxis that are non-confessional in nature, the practice of community hermeneutics can be repristinated or reimagined for the edification and maturation of the church community (Eph. 4:13-16) and the accomplishment of our mission in the world.

In this chapter, we will attempt to outline one example of how a community of faith working together and guided by the Holy Spirit and Scripture can live out its historical emphasis on community hermeneutics by examining the context and process for Jericho Ridge Community Church's 2009 dialogue on Women In Ministry Leadership (WIML).

Our intent is not to dictate the convictions we have arrived at on this theological issue, nor is it to hold up this process as applicable for all contexts. Rather it is our humble desire to provide a "third way" between the polarities of hierarchical exclusivity—where a few

well-schooled individuals mandate the path for the church—and the silence and inaction on a topic to which the Scripture gives witness.

Furthermore, we hope that we can aid others both in finding their own way through complex theological issues and, in exhibiting a posture of openness, to having the larger community of faith sharpen and shape the theological reflection of a congregation. Part of our aim in this chapter is to welcome the addition of other voices to the conversation so that Christ-followers everywhere can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the identity and mission of Mennonite Brethren and the value that they place on community hermeneutics.

Historical Context to the Question of Women in Ministry Leadership

Mennonite Brethren have made slow, and at times painful, strides towards freeing women to exercise their gifts. While an 1879 resolution prohibited women from preaching or participating in discussions in church business meetings, many women were ordained as missionaries during the first half of the twentieth century.[1] In 1981 the Mennonite Brethren General Conference encouraged women to participate in "local church and conference ministries," but did not agree to "ordain women to pastoral leadership."[2] Following several additional resolutions the General Conference finally clarified its position in 1999 by encouraging women "to minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate."[3]

By 2003 it became clear in the Canadian context that various voices were asking for this conversation to be re-opened. Thus, the Canadian Conference Board of Faith and Life began a multi-year process, which involved regional study conferences and conversations in preparation for a vote at Gathering 2006 in Calgary. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe the national process that led up to that point, but it is essential to note the following resolution that was presented and approved by the national body:

> It is evident that individuals and congregations practice a diversity of convictions based on different interpretations of Scripture as it regards the church's freedom to call women to serve in ministry and pastoral leadership. On this non-confessional issue, the Board of Faith and Life recommends that the Conference bless each member

> church in its own discernment of Scripture, conviction and practice to call and affirm gifted men and women to serve in ministry and pastoral leadership.[4]

It is also not the intention of this chapter to provide a comprehensive biblical or historical perspective on either complementarianism or egalitarianism.[5] It is perhaps sufficient to note that the role of women in ministry leadership has been discerned and treated as a non-confessional issue by the Canadian Conference Board of Faith and Life, which means that it remains at the level of polity or having to do with the structural organization of the church.

A Rationale for Engagement: Why Have a Potentially Divisive Dialogue?

While the 2006 vote on the Women in Ministry Leadership resolution by the Board of Faith and Life was the summation of a multi-year process, there was also a recognition that this dialogue had largely been held at the denominational level where few members of Mennonite Brethren congregations across the country had engaged in anything more than a cursory reading about the issue. The process of theological reflection had begun, but there was much work yet to be done for local congregations to process and take ownership of the resolution.

Explicit within the 2006 resolution was the invitation for this dialogue to continue at the level of the local congregation. In a subsequent letter on the "Implications for our Conference of the Gathering 2006 Resolution," Executive Director David Wiebe wrote, "The purpose of this resolution is to empower congregations to exercise freedom of conscience before Christ in determining what leadership polity will reflect their faithfulness to the Word of God. The Board of Faith and Life encourages congregations to articulate the means and method of reaching that consensus for its members and adherents."[6]

It was our understanding as a local church that the Board of Faith and Life had laid out a prospective model of how to proceed with its invitation to engage in careful biblical study and discernment, to host open dialogue sessions through study conferences and other means, and then to reach a resolution together. We saw this as a call to practice Acts 15:28 within our own congregation, and to see what would "seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us" as we proceeded through the dialogue. Our intent at Jericho Ridge, in opening up this dialogue, was

partly in response to that invitation and partly in response to our own questions and the dynamics that naturally arose from our context in a suburban metropolitan area in Western Canada.

As we began to develop people for leadership at all levels of our church family, our Board of Elders began to realize that having no current policy or direction regarding the practice of women being called and affirmed in ministry was impeding our ability to articulate *who* was gifted, called and affirmed for *which* ministries, and on *what basis*. Accordingly, our Board of Elders came to the decision that it was important early in the life of our church to establish a policy on this topic, which was based upon our theological convictions and could increase our effectiveness in mission.

Our Board of Elders also realized that individuals and congregations practice a diversity of convictions regarding the church's freedom to call women to serve in ministry leadership. We saw this as an exciting opportunity to learn how to wrestle with a complex issue together. We wanted people to learn important interpretative skills and to reach a higher level of emotional and spiritual maturity as we wrestled with the process and outcomes. It was important for us to express to the church that there was no agenda or foregone conclusion driving the conversation. Our goal was to learn *how* to think, not to tell people *what* to think.

In our discussion at the local church level, we were also careful to use language that people with little or no theological training could easily understand. It was important that we defined the scope of the question clearly and helped people to understand that this was an issue of polity as opposed to confessional integrity.[7]

We also articulated to the congregation that we were well aware that our best, biblically-sound scholars and church leaders take differing views on this issue. Therefore, we called people to a spirit of humility and asked everyone to suspend prior judgment as we moved into this process—not labeling those who may come to different conclusions as possessing inadequate biblical knowledge or as spiritually immature. We called people to remember their commitment to live out the biblical injunctions of love, peace and mutual edification (Rom. 14:13, 19), regardless of the outcome on the specific question at hand.

Our Board of Elders was committed to leading Jericho Ridge through the constructive tension of analyzing both our biblical interpretation and our present context with respect to questions of calling, giftedness and the roles of men and women in the life of a local

church. We invited all views, questions and concerns to be expressed in healthy and respectful ways, and to be driven not by emotion or experience but by theological conviction.

Our Experience of Community Discernment

The leadership team was driven by the belief that the process of discussing the question was just as important as the resolution we would arrive at. Consequently, if we did not interact with each other in ways that could be described as harmonious, humble, sympathetic or loving (1 Pet. 3:8), then our process would be seen as a failure, regardless of the outcome. Furthermore, it was our desire to include as many people in the process as possible so that our congregation would not only take ownership of the discussion, but also be better equipped to initiate and engage in future conversations regarding biblical interpretation and the life of the church.

These commitments clarified how we encouraged our congregation to engage in the dialogue and eventually made the formulation of the process much easier. In addition to the premises already mentioned, we recognized that enabling people to feel heard would be of paramount importance. This objective shaped our strategy for how we structured our times and spheres for teaching, learning, interacting and responding.

We also realized that the actions of our leadership team, as well as people's perceptions of this group, would greatly influence the attitudes and participation of the congregation. As a result, we chose to respond in the same way that we asked others to, namely, to suspend judgment on the question so that everyone involved could truly listen to perspectives that differed from their own. By refraining from disclosing personal opinions before the process was completed, our Board of Elders was able to speak in a voice that was cohesive and unified.

First Steps

We realized that we were initiating a conversation that would involve additional time and expertise that went beyond what our Board of Elders could manage. Furthermore, we desired to include members of our congregation who represented different perspectives and who could provide greater vision for what we needed. We elected to commission a WIML Task Force who would work with our Board

of Elders on the content and the process of the discussion. They were charged with the tasks of defining the scope of the conversation (specifically the precise questions that were being asked), presenting a timeline for the discussion and defining operational parameters. The Task Force also functioned as advisors in the process and championed the vision of the process to the rest of the congregation. The Task Force was comprised of six members: our lead pastor, two members of the Board of Elders and three members of the congregation (two female, one male).

The Task Force developed a document called the "WIML Playbook," which provided guidelines for respectful dialogue throughout the process. This document presented a vision for how we envisioned the discussion and called people to respond to one another in biblical love and mutual submission. It also listed specific actions that would not be tolerated and gave instructions for what would happen if lines were crossed. Once again, the rationale for the careful construction and implementation of the WIML Playbook was driven by our belief that the process was just as important as the resolution.

The Task Force was instrumental in outlining the process of our WIML events by emphasizing the variety of options available for individuals to interact with others and the question at hand. The strategy was for WIML material to be presented in large teaching venues, smaller discussion forums and small group environments so that people could participate in various levels of engagement depending on their interest in the topic. Our church staff then took emerging recommendations and established an events calendar that reflected these emphases.

Sunday Morning Teaching

The pastoral staff chose to introduce a Sunday morning teaching series that addressed issues and questions, which undergirded and paralleled the question of women in ministry leadership without rushing too quickly into the specific texts or viewpoints that those who might already be familiar with the discussion would be looking for. Part of our rationale was that the WIML discussion involved a number of other questions and assumptions, which needed to be identified and brought to the surface before we could have a productive and meaningful conversation. For example, we recognized that the question of biblical authority would be a subtopic that would undoubtedly rise

and could be used in ways that would elevate or relegate a particular viewpoint. We anticipated that the dialogue could be stalled by related or underlying issues and people's inability to get past these sudden roadblocks.

Due to the efforts of Mark Batterson and the generosity of National Community Church, in permitting us to borrow their creative materials, we chose to launch a teaching series called "The Elephant in the Church," which addressed common assumptions and unhealthy practices that often shine more brightly in the midst of theological disagreement.[8] Through the course of nine weeks—which carried us through our public WIML calendar—the Sunday morning teaching time was spent addressing topics such as biblical hermeneutics ("How do we read the same Bible together?" "What does the Bible really mean?"), church mission and relevance ("What is the purpose of the church?" "How far should a church go in being relevant?" "Which beliefs are core and which are peripheral?"), church leadership ("Who gets to call the shots and why?"), disagreement and emotion ("How do faith and feelings mix?" "How do we fight fairly?"), and establishing direction ("How do we discern God's will together?"). The Sunday morning teaching plan was a strategy to equip people for the WIML dialogue while also expanding their theological foundation.

Teaching Forums

In order to address the specific WIML question, we organized four public forums to provide information for people to process and discuss in other contexts. The purpose of the first forum was to clarify our church's leadership structure and to outline the WIML process. The second forum was devoted to understanding how a church's missional context can influence the vision and direction of the church. At the third forum, presentations were given by two individuals who represented differing biblical interpretations regarding WIML. The final forum was dedicated to the learnings and lingering questions of our small groups (see below).

In conjunction with the public forums, we organized six small group environments to discuss WIML during their weekly meetings. The majority of these groups were home Bible study groups who put their regularly scheduled curriculum on hold in order to follow the WIML calendar. These groups discussed the content from the previous public forum (study questions were organized by the pastoral staff

and facilitated by the group leader) and studied *Gifted, Called, and Affirmed*, the commentary published in 2008 by the Canadian Conference's Board of Faith and Life.[9] A member of the Board of Elders was present at each discussion group. The rationale for this was threefold: first, we believed that it would give group members another opportunity to be heard by the Board; second, we hoped that we would discover the questions with which people were still grappling; third, we perceived that we would gain insight into the question of when people had spent enough time discussing the topic.

Beyond these organized activities, we called individuals to take ownership of their own theological development through the study of additional resources and through intentional prayer for the church and the process we were going through. We provided the congregation with a list of recommended resources, given not to guide individuals in a predetermined direction, but to expand their understanding of the topic, thus allowing them to give credence to multiple interpretations.

Analyzing our Process

One of our most puzzling questions going into the dialogue was the uncertainty of knowing how much time to allot to the discussion. During our planning, we allotted three months to the events and discussion of WIML. As the end of our discussion approached, our Task Force and Board of Elders compiled a congregational survey, which was distributed to all of our attendees on a Sunday morning. The primary motivation behind this strategy was to discover if the congregation felt that enough time had been devoted to the WIML process. The Task Force collected and tallied the results and passed them on to the Board. Based on the survey, it became very apparent that the congregation had felt heard and that they were confident in the resolution the Board would develop.

Resolution

Our Board of Elders devoted a portion of their annual summer retreat to reach a WIML resolution. An external facilitator was invited to direct the conversation, which enabled the Board to work together more efficiently. After many hours of dialogue and prayer, the Board finally reached a resolution. A subcommittee of the Board was then established to take the resolution and craft a short paper, which would

announce the resolution and resulting policy to the Jericho Ridge congregation. This subcommittee worked together on the paper for several months before it was distributed and read to the congregation during a Sunday morning gathering; a full ten months after the public WIML process had begun.

Key Learnings

What We Learned about Process

This section summarizes briefly some of our learning outcomes through our Women in Ministry Leadership process. We learned that even though our church has a strong elder-led structure, the process is just as important as the outcome. Our Board of Elders could have erred on either end of the spectrum. A democratic process could have been employed (such as a congregational vote on the issue), but this may have resulted in a missed opportunity for engagement and education. Likewise, the Board could have reached a decision on their own; this might have resulted in a position paper being placed in a policy binder, but never actually owned or acted upon within the life of our congregation.

We also learned about the value of repetitive communication. Even after our entire congregation had been fully vested in a three-month learning and discussion cycle, many people were still unable to articulate why we were engaged in the process. This level of apathy is not unique to issues of theology or to our local church; it is simply an observation that the entire church will never genuinely be able to engage in the whole discussion for the full duration of the process. In many ways, the decision marks only the beginning of the process. Leaders still need to work towards continued education and implementation, and address any unintended outcomes that the decision brings with it.

What We Learned About How People Approach Theology

A common perception is that lay people are not interested in discussions of a theological nature. The assumption is that most people are glad to leave these conversations to the pastors, elders or those charged with theological watch care over a congregation or denomination. Our experience with the WIML discussion was just the opposite.

We discovered that when presented with a compelling and accessible opportunity, many people genuinely want to engage in theological discussions. They may not have all of the necessary tools, but those who are mature in their faith are searching for venues for genuine and deep engagement with the biblical text and its implications for their lives.[10] This ought to be encouraging news for all who are theological educators, whether they are in places of Christian higher education, denominational representatives such as the Board of Faith and Life, or local pastoral leaders.

This is not to say, however, that people will always engage in a way that radically transforms their thinking. We were amazed at times by the rationale behind people's views and how strongly they held them. In a process such as this, leaders need to be ready to be surprised and even blindsided by the strength and emotional attachment with which people carry their views. Many people will either disguise their emotion as logic or their logic as emotion. We decided that it was important that everybody was heard, but not for every experience or viewpoint to be validated. We found there were no reliable predictive factors (for example, age, gender or upbringing) that assisted leaders in navigating the complexity of subtext, history and personality behind the conversations. The goal of arriving at a place of understanding and conviction as a community requires that leaders need to be prepared to engage in deep relationships and prioritize ample time to listen to what is being said.

In our process, we sought not merely to listen to what was expressed, but also to find ways to discover what was not said. We wanted to hear those who were not vocal, yet had an opinion. This came in various ways, with the most prominent being our online discussion forum, which housed questions, reading hints and other resources. Although it was underutilized, we felt that it was an important part of the process to provide a voice to those unaccustomed to public speaking.

What We Learned about Our Anabaptist Roots

One of the most common and more striking comments that we encountered in our dialogue was the simple, but often ambiguous, phrase, "But the Bible says…" Those who were raised in a church tradition with a high view of Scripture were quick to wonder if a dialogue of this nature wasn't a ploy of revisionist theology leading to the

proverbial slippery slope. However, as we pressed into this response, we came to understand that a stringent biblicism can be almost pathological, as opposed to a genuine and humble appeal to authority. It can highlight the tendency for people to atomize Scripture and to pick and choose their favorite verses to support their ideas instead of being honest about their own interpretative lens.[11] Unfortunately, as simple as that process might be, the study of an isolated cluster of biblical texts alone does not always provide us with answers to questions regarding issues of a non-confessional theological nature. The strong temptation exists for those who lean towards being egalitarian to be familiar only with passages where freedom is given to women for ministry, and for complimentarians to be well versed in passages where restrictions are placed on women.[12] The real challenge is to suspend judgment, to seek to learn humbly from one another and to walk through the process of learning and studying together as a local church community.

In this process, we must also be honest about the influences that shape our decision making and theology. Everyone brought presuppositions about leadership models and cultural views on men and women and on ministry into our conversations. Our Anabaptist forbearers modeled well for us that we need not only the textual and historical context, but also an understanding of the social contours in which we work, to teach, penetrate and inform the theology we cherish. For example, the unique theological emphases of each historical stream of Anabaptism grew out of their particular geographies and the wider social, moral, political and theological influences that permeated the areas in which they were located.[13]

This is why it is so important to ask the question of missional context. WIML might be a vibrant and productive conversation in Langley, British Columbia, but a divisive and unhelpful conversation in other contexts. If, as is the case in some areas of the world, the adoption of an egalitarian stance would lead to the dismissal of the message of the gospel because of the gender of the messenger, then the process of seeking freedom for women to minister alongside of men would look much different. In our forum on biblical understanding where we searched the Scripture together and sought to honor and understand the tensions and the viewpoints that are present within it, we were reminded that "in Christ, we who have differences are invited to radical freedom and oneness with impartiality...[But] God's even greater desire is that reconciliation through Jesus spread to all people and peoples. Therefore, believing women and men are to voluntarily

curb their freedoms whenever that becomes necessary for others to catch the Message."[14] This demonstrates that in many ways, the Canadian Conference 2006 decision was not solely about WIML, but was also an invitation for local churches to explore their missional context and make careful theological application that will further the work and ministry of the gospel.[15] This is also why we are not advocates of the position we have come to for its own sake. We are in full support of the call to live in harmony with those who hold different conclusions on this matter.

Summary

Historically, Mennonite Brethren have identified themselves as "people of the book." Nevertheless, how they approach the Bible to determine questions of mission and practice has been a much debated subject. We have sought to highlight Jericho Ridge Community Church's 2009 discussion on Women in Ministry Leadership and how one church took the Canadian Conference's 2006 decision in Calgary and fleshed it out in a local congregational setting. Our goal was to focus more on the process of community hermeneutics instead of being prescriptive in our understanding of the many complex issues that surround the question of Women in Ministry Leadership.

In our situation, we are still working to call women who have been unaccustomed to being invited to lead with their gifts at the eldership level in a local church. We have women who are gifted and who have been called out from the congregation on our staff and ministry teams who serve effectively and witness powerfully to the unity of the gospel and to the ability of men and women to serve together in mutually submissive and Christ-honoring ways. All of this is rooted in our understanding of the great commission and the great commandment. It is more important to be faithful to our call to a deeper love of God and a deeper love of neighbor than it is to win a theological battle or designing an airtight congregational discernment process. Theology ought to lead us deeper into relationship with Jesus and with one another. Our hope and prayer is that this process has helped our people learn to grapple with the Bible, with our culture and with one another in more significant ways. It has also deepened our conviction that the Mennonite Brethren practice of community hermeneutics within a missional context can be a key to unlocking potentially thorny conversations on faith and practice. We humbly present our practice as a

possible model for congregational discussion so that both discernment processes and outcomes can be joy-producing and God-honoring acts of worship (Acts 15:30).

Endnotes

1 See Doug Heidebrecht, "Mennonite Brethren Ordination of Women, 1899-1958," *Mennonite Historian* 34, no.4 (December 2008): 1-2, 8-9.

2 *Yearbook: 55th Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (August 7-11, 1981): 46-47.

3 *Yearbook, 62nd Convention of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (July 8-10, 1999): 30. For a more comprehensive list of the various resolutions, see the "Archived Materials" section of the Canadian Conference site: http://www.mbconf.ca/home/events_and_conferences/learning_together/women_in_ministry_leadership/a_word_from_the_bfl/mb_resolutions/ (accessed June 22, 2010).

4 "Board of Faith and Life Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, February 24, 2006, 15. For more on the rationale behind this resolution and a word on its implementation and implications, see http://www.mbconf.ca/home/events_and_conferences/learning_together/women_in_ministry_leadership/board_of_faith_and_life_women_in_ministry_leadership_resolution/

5 There are many nuanced definitions of these terms. For the purposes of this paper, however, complementarianism is the view that men and women are both gifted by God in ways that compliment each other but that men should hold positions of spiritual leadership (elders) or pastoral leadership in the church. Egalitarianism generally tends to see positional male headship as cultural in a New Testament context and would invite men and women to serve in any arena in the life of the church where their gifts and calling is affirmed by the community.

6 Available at http://www.mbconf.ca/home/events_and_conferences/learning_together/women_in_ministry_leadership/gathering_2006_resolution_implications_for_our_conference/ (accessed June 21, 2010).

7 As an example, we reminded our congregation clearly in each meeting not only of the ground rules for dialogue, but also that no one was going to heaven or hell over their answer to this question. This created a safe space for dialogue and healthy levels of disagreement emerged during the meeting instead of happening in covert ways.

8 See http://www.theaterchurch.com/media/section/the-elephant-in-the-church/ (accessed June 2, 2011).

9 "Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. *Gifted, Called and Affirmed: A Pastoral Application and Commentary on the Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution of Gathering 2006* (Winnipeg: Board of Faith and Life of the

Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and Kindred Productions, 2008).

10 For an example of this discussion, see Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *REVEAL: Where Are You?* (Chicago: Willow Creek Association 2007).

11 See Tim Geddert's chapter in this volume.

12 Egalitarian passages may include Mark 5:25-34; Luke 7:36-50; Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-42, 13:10-17; Phil. 4;2-3; Rom. 16:7; Acts 18:26, 16:13-14, 21:9; and 1 Cor. 11:5, 12:1-31. Complementarian passages may include 1 Cor. 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-15.

13 It is worth noting that the church in Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. developed a very different position on the role of the church and the state than our Anabaptist forbears did, largely because of the context in which they lived and read the Scripture together.

14 Andrew Dyck, "My Journey with the Bible: Women in Ministry Leadership" – available at http://www.s3.amazonaws.com/static.jerichoridge.com/attachment/file_name/480/Forum__3_-_Andrew_Dyck s_Handout.pdf. (accessed June 24, 2011). See also Gal. 3:28 (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Cor. 8-10).

15 For example, a similar process could be deployed if a congregation wished to further flesh out the Conference's position on a person who has experienced divorce serving in a ministry leadership role.

Missional
Reflections

The Global Mennonite Brethren Mission Movement: Some Reflections and Projections

Ray Harms-Wiebe

The tendency of any movement seeking to define its future is to focus on the "why" (the motivational impulse), the "what" (the task), the "how" (best practice principles), the "where" (strategic destination of resources: prayer, people, finances), and the "when" (the timing of the engagement). Without a clear understanding of the "who" of mission, however, missionary action will be tentative, result-focused, incoherent and sporadic. For example, Mennonite Brethren cannot incarnate the life of Jesus among the least-reached people groups of the world, if they do not understand themselves to be Spirit-filled disciples under the lordship of Jesus who are ready to immerse themselves long-term in the mission context, willing to die for the chosen people group based on a love for Jesus and committed to steadfastly investing in the growth of his kingdom. If Christians do not take time to reflect on who God is, and who they are in light of him, they will be disoriented by their encounter with resistance, and the fruit of the missionary endeavor will be left wanting and confused. Answers to the question of the "who" of mission will serve as a foundation from which to respond to questions of why, what, how, where and when. Mennonite Brethren must, therefore, reflectively ask questions of identity (being).

Over the past 150 years the global Mennonite Brethren mission movement has responded to Christ's great commission to make disciples of all nations. Although this response has been enthusiastic, it has often lacked a clear understanding of their identity in God both as individuals and as a community. While the Mennonite Brethren global family has experienced significant growth, it has at times, been characterized by evangelical activism and individual vision rather than by a communal understanding of a God-given identity and mission. As Mennonite Brethren embrace the challenges of the twenty-first cen-

tury, they will need to revisit their theological underpinnings, define their ecclesiological identity, clarify their understanding of leadership, articulate their vision of holistic ministry and contemplate the implications of being a global family called to mission. The future of Mennonite Brethren as a mission movement ultimately depends on their understanding and experience of God.

Hence, this paper will not explore the impact of global trends such as population growth, environmental crises, materialism, technological advance, pluralism, moral relativism, urbanization, mission-migration, short-term mission and economic disparity. If Mennonite Brethren focus on the world context prior to understanding God and themselves, they will fall prey to the latest wave in world mission conversation and literature. This paper will review five marks of the Mennonite Brethren mission movement (1860-2010) and then suggest a path forward based on their collective experience, the challenges of the biblical text and the current realities of the global Mennonite Brethren family.

Marks of the Mennonite Brethren Mission Movement: 1860-2010

Anabaptist and Pietist Foundations

The Anabaptist foundations gifted Mennonite Brethren with the story of spiritual renewal as well as key emphases or characteristics of a church in the process of transformation. Foundational themes in discipleship and mission were an unabashed belief that human transformation is possible through an encounter with Jesus, a genuine wrestling with the Word of God (early Anabaptists were known as "radical Bible readers"), an unswerving commitment to follow Jesus in both word (orthodoxy) and deed (orthopraxis) and an unapologetic obedience to the great commission (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-20; Ps. 24:1) and the great commandment (Matt. 22:37-40). Faithfulness to these understandings of discipleship was often tested in hostile environments. Critical ecclesiological emphases resulted in the formation of covenanted communities of faith characterized by mutual care and accountability, the church as the most visible manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth, and the calling and empowerment of all disciples to serve God in the church and in the world (priesthood of all believers).

As a renewal movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Mennonite Brethren were heavily influenced by pietist lea-

ders who called the Mennonites of southern Russia (now Ukraine) to personal transformation through repentance and submission to the lordship of Christ, nurture and growth through the study of Scripture and the enduring validity of the great commission. Although pietism often included an emphasis on political justice and social reform, this does not appear to have influenced the early Mennonite Brethren. They remained focused on personal transformation, church restoration and reaching those outside the community of faith. Interestingly, the Mennonite Brethren renewal inspired them to revisit their Anabaptist foundations and discover the value of their spiritual beginnings. According to George W. Peters, "The return to Anabaptist-Mennonitism was also a return to witnessing, evangelism and missions; for evangelism was a prominent if not the dominant quality of sixteenth century Anabaptism."[1]

Global Mission Expansion of the Mennonite Brethren Church

The newly formed Mennonite Brethren Church of southern Russia understood that every individual should be a witness. "As the product of a revival movement within the larger Mennonite community, the Mennonite Brethren have from the very beginning in 1860 sensed a missionary responsibility toward the world," writes Hans Kasdorf.[2] At the first convention in 1872, mission was the main theme. P. M. Friesen stated that they were compelled to go, regardless of whether or not they had any means at their disposal for the work; the Lord was simply too powerful.[3]

Itinerant preachers shared their new faith with Mennonite neighbors, other German-speaking colonists in Russia (Lutherans), their Russian neighbors (Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Swedes), and eventually went as far as the tribes of Siberia. Mennonite Brethren were instrumental in the founding and growth of the Baptist movements within the Russian empire. The convention of 1918 referred to forty-four itinerant preachers working in thirty-seven different locations throughout Russia. Although there was a tremendous response from the Russian people, new converts and evangelists were severely persecuted by the Czarist regime. This missionary effort from southern Russia was effectively stifled in 1928 by Stalin's regime, at least as an organized effort on the part of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Individual members and families, however, continued to serve Jesus in remote villages and concentration camps within the Soviet empire.

Second generation Mennonite Brethren vacillated in the face of mandatory military service, the enforcement of Russification and the prohibition of mission efforts. In this context, some of the itinerant preachers, such as Johann Wieler, proved to be too visionary for the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Some began to look beyond Russian borders. Abraham Friesen sensed God's call to work among the Telugus of the Muslim Kingdom of Nizam (now Andhra Pradesh) in southern India. Because the Mennonite Brethren were not permitted to establish their own mission agency in Russia, they partnered with the American Baptist Missionary Union of Boston. Another eighteen Mennonite Brethren from Russia and others from the United States joined the Friesens. The mission work prospered. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Russian Mennonite Brethren mission work in India was forcefully terminated and the fruit of their efforts in India was embraced by the American Baptists.

The chaos of World War I turned Mennonite Brethren eyes back to Russia and provided the context for heroic examples of faithfulness. Russian soldiers were given medical care, evangelized, counseled and taught through the Tent Mission (*Zeltmission*) led by Jakob Dyck, the "Wandering Bible School" organized by Adolf Reimer and the ministries of Light in the East (*Licht im Osten*) founded by Jakob Kroeker and Walter Jack. Jakob Kroeker writes, "Our soul knows of no higher aspirations than to stand in the center of divine action and events, and to witness of the creative and life-giving power of God's grace."[4] It is estimated that from 1914-19, Russian evangelicals grew from 500,000 to approximately three million.[5]

While the Russian Mennonite Brethren suffered through revolution, famine and communist oppression, the American Mennonite Brethren mission movement matured. In 1896 two Mennonite Brethren couples were commissioned to serve under the Berlin Baptist Mission Society in Cameroon, Africa because the Mennonite Brethren Conference did not have its own mission agency. In that same year, the Committee for Foreign Mission was formed, influenced by a letter from Abraham Friesen and provoked by the Baptist recruitment of missionaries from among their churches. The American Mennonite Brethren did not want their mission work simply to be absorbed by American and German Baptists.

It is interesting to note that although the American Mennonite Brethren churches first organized as a conference in 1879, the first constitution and legal charter was only adopted in 1900. It was known

as the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union. In fact, the conference was structured more like a mission agency than an ecclesiastical body. Abraham Schellenberg, the first director, believed that global mission would unite the Mennonite Brethren churches then scattered across the mid-western plains of the United States, which then numbered only 1800 members.[6]

In 1896 the N. N. Hieberts were commissioned for missionary service to India and in 1899 India was officially adopted as the first foreign mission field of American Mennonite Brethren. In 1919 China was accepted as a mission field in response to the zealous efforts of Frank and Agnes Wiens in the Fujian province. In 1920, through the missionary work of Aaron and Ernestina Janzen, the DR Congo was added. For almost fifty years, India, China and the DR Congo served as the three pillars of North American Mennonite Brethren mission engagement.

With the migration of Russian Mennonite Brethren to the Americas and the mission initiatives of North American Mennonite Brethren, the Mennonite Brethren mission movement spread to Latin America, Asia and Western Europe: Brazil (1944), Colombia (1945), West China (1945), Peru (1950), Mexico (1950), Japan (1950), Austria (1951), Germany (1951), Paraguay (1955) and Panama (1959). Wherever the Mennonite Brethren moved, whether through migration or intentional mission activity, they planted churches and engaged in social ministry. Paul Hiebert writes, "To be sure, matters of theology, church polity, education and publications have united the churches in concerted action, but none of these has so encapsulated the vision and the energies of the Mennonite Brethren as has mission."[7]

Three Priorities for Mennonite Brethren Mission

Abraham Friesen's mission philosophy contained a two-fold mandate: one was evangelistic, the other was pastoral-didactic. Other mission initiatives, such as medicine and education, were considered to be auxiliary. Friesen's chief concern was the verbal proclamation of the gospel. Friesen's thinking remained embedded in Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services International's (MBMSI) vision documents of 1990 and 1997 in which the mission outlined its three priorities: evangelism and church planting, leadership training and nurture, and social ministries. Of these three, evangelism and church planting have served as the central focus. Social ministries (health, agriculture, de-

velopment, vocational training) have been viewed as something to be incorporated, not as an integral part of the process. Conceptually and functionally, Mennonite Brethren have struggled throughout their history to reconcile evangelism and church planting initiatives with social ministries.[8] This struggle was even reflected in the name of the North American Mennonite Brethren Mission: "Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services" (MBMS).

Leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church's Mission

The relatively small conferences of Mennonite Brethren churches in Russia and North America, although sometimes slow to take action, were moved forward by their visionaries. Burning with missionary zeal, visionary leaders moved beyond the parameters of the conference structures and started new initiatives (for example, Johann Wieler and the Russian Baptists; G. W. Peters and the West Coast Children's Mission; Aaron Janzen and the Kafumba Mission, Henry Bartsch and the Bololo Mission; and Frank Wiens and the South China Mission among the Hakkas). The tension caused by their new initiatives is evidenced in the minutes of MBMS International and Mennonite Brethren conventions.

Mennonite Brethren missionaries tended to follow the leadership models learned in their North American home churches. Pastors and teachers were trained for established churches. In India and the DR Congo, national evangelists were equipped and supported. As early as 1945 J. N. C. Hiebert wrote of the need for an indigenous, self-replicating model that would evangelize, disciple and train leaders. MBMSI's document, "Vision for the Future: Goals for the 90s," states, "the mission of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to glorify God by bringing the gospel of Christ to the unevangelized of the world and by ministering to the needs of humanity, to the end that people of all nations are discipled into vibrant, active reproducing churches" (Acts 1:8, Matt. 28:19).[9]

The education of church members has been emphasized by Mennonite Brethren as critical for Christian growth. Unfortunately, the training models have resembled the Bible school models of Canada and the United States, rather than the indigenous models of other contexts. Seldom were apostolic leadership and mission sending encouraged among the newly reached people groups. Through the pas-

sage of time, the distinction between clergy and laity has become more pronounced worldwide.

Internationalization of the Mennonite Brethren Church

During the centennial year of the Mennonite Brethren Church (1960), with the growth of the Mennonite Brethren churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America, it was proposed in North America that the name of the Conference be changed to "The General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches" and that the Conference include all Mennonite Brethren churches of the global family. This name change was officially accepted in 1963. The purpose of this name change was "world-wide fellowship and mission."[10] The International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) was eventually formed in 1990 and served to strengthen relationships among leading members of the Mennonite Brethren global family. This conversation has resulted in the writing of the ICOMB Confession of Faith, the publication of a global Mennonite Brethren history,[11] the establishment of a Global Scholarship Fund and the formation of the Global Mission Alliance. In the early 1990s MBMSI forecasted a "more extensive resource pool (spiritual, human and material)" from the worldwide Mennonite Brethren church.[12] Missionaries from many ICOMB partner conferences are now serving around the world (for example, Japanese couples in Thailand; Colombian couples in Mexico, Panama and Peru; Congolese couples in South Africa and the Republic of Congo, and Uruguayans in France and North Africa).

The Future of the Mennonite Brethren Mission Movement

From Three-Person Reference to Trinitarian Experience

The mandate to reach the world with the love of Christ does not arise from historical documents, but from God himself. A call to spiritual renewal in the twenty-first century, therefore, is not so much a beckoning to return to Anabaptist or pietist foundations, but rather a call to return to the same God who inspired the early Anabaptists and the first Mennonite Brethren. Engagement in the missionary task must be grounded in relationship with the same Father who sent Jesus to earth and the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus. Christians work in communion with the Trinity who, in the most extraordinary

of invitations, has invited them to know him intimately, to hear his voice, and to work with him. He has invited Christians to have an essential role in nothing less than the reaching of the nations for eternity.

Mennonite Brethren understand that the missionary mandate is rooted in Christ's immeasurable love, which seeks to save humanity from personal and collective sin and to minister to human suffering. It is also grounded in his holiness, which strives for righteousness, justice and peace, and his authority as exalted Lord, which gives the authority to serve wherever he calls. Mission is "rooted in God's mission in the world as revealed in the Scriptures.[13] The incarnation of the Son of God, his loving identification with humanity and his self-giving sacrifice are the model for the missionary church.

From a confessional perspective, mission is also the mission of the Father and the Holy Spirit, but Mennonite Brethren have had difficulty articulating the Father's active engagement and have been even more guarded when it has come to trusting and facilitating the loving work of the Spirit. In Scripture, all three members of the Trinity are actively involved. The Father, the great "I AM," passionately desires to see his glory cover the earth. As the lover of all peoples, he is on a mission to draw all people to himself. As the ultimate expression of his gracious will for all of creation, he sends his Son Jesus. The Father desires deep, bonded relationships with his children. He wants to be known.

Jesus is the "I AM" revealed. Through the incarnation, the glory and holiness of the Father are unveiled in human history. Although all things have been created through him, Jesus empties himself in order to redeem a fallen humanity that cannot save itself. He is the only Way to salvation, the Truth that liberates, and the Life that makes whole. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus opens the way to the new covenant between the Father and his children, and shows the way to covenant community for all who desire to follow his self-emptying path. He is the Good Shepherd who knows and cares for his sheep.

The Holy Spirit is the evangelist who witnesses to Jesus and leads his followers to wholeness. He enables God's children to perceive their distance from the Father's glory and awakens within them a desire for intimacy with the Father. He teaches the truths of the kingdom to followers of Jesus and binds them together in covenant community through his indwelling presence. He transforms God's children from glory to glory. He is the creative power who equips Jesus' disciples and empowers them for service. All three persons in the Trinity work

together in perfect harmony to reveal their glory, to serve and to love human beings, to establish covenants, and to shepherd their children.

Mennonite Brethren confessional statements, however, tend to focus on function, rather than on how God works and relates. They emphasize the roles and activities of God, but they give little reference to being and to relationship within the Trinity. Church mission should be defined by the "who" of God and the nature of the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[14] The collective experience of the Godhead must be more than a theological reference to a Triune God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit invite disciples into a dynamic, loving reality. They want their followers to experience life in its fullness.

In the most recent MBMSI document, "Global Mission Guidelines," which endeavors to outline vision, priorities and strategies for the twenty-first century, theological foundations are summarized in a few pages.[15] The same document dedicates ten pages to partnership and program. The relationship between theology and practice, however, is not explained. As a result, the areas of partnership and program suffer because of a lack of deep reflection on how God relates and works in community. This same oversight is evidenced in the ICOMB Confession of Faith, the confessional statement of the children of the Mennonite Brethren global mission endeavor. As Paul Hiebert writes, mission depends on "the establishment of relationships between individuals and groups of individuals. To a great extent the success of missions lies in the nature and quality of these relationships.[16] For the Trinity "to be" means to be in relationship. Father, Son and Holy Spirit love each other deeply, glorify each other, cede to each other, enhance each other, release each other for specific roles, share everything, are committed to eternal oneness and always communicate with each other. Together they share their glory, reign over all things, communicate the good news, save the world and enter into covenants with their people. God desires that the global Mennonite Brethren family experience this oneness.

From Ecclesial "Quietism" to People on a Mission (Mission Ecclesiology)

Although Mennonite Brethren rightly consider the church to be the primary agent of God's mission to the world, and understand their foremost role to be that of making disciples of all nations, they have not clearly articulated a mission ecclesiology. Their ecclesial practice has

often reflected a conflictive relationship between self-preservation and an interest in the salvation of souls. At times in Mennonite Brethren history, external pressures (economic hardship, discrimination and persecution) have encouraged an internal disposition to consider the opportunities of the foreign mission context more readily while remaining "quiet" in the local church context. The first Anabaptists were not the "quiet in the land." Many courageously gave their lives for the evangelization of their own European neighbors.

An understanding of the "who" of God should shape the "who" of the church. The gathered community of faith is to be more than adherence to Anabaptist principles of ecclesiology. In essence, the church is to be a reflection of the Godhead on earth. It is to live the reality of God's presence (glory), embody the values of the kingdom of heaven and make disciples of all people groups.

If God defines what it means to be alive, then the church is to be the most tangible expression of that life. If God empowers human beings for service, then the church must be an experience of God's gracious reign and the empowering body that releases its members for mission to the world. If God is present in the world to save and restore, then the church must exist for the redemption of the world and be the community of faith, which ministers healing and radically works for peace. If the Trinity lives in eternal covenant community and seeks to covenant with human beings, then the church should be the human community where covenant values are embodied through the bonding of the Holy Spirit. If God is one who compassionately cares and shepherds his people, then the church should be the community where the Shepherd's voice is heard and disciples learn to follow his counsel. The church is to be a visible revelation of the Trinity to a watching world. To be seen it must be actively involved in the world.

From Pastoral-Teaching Maintenance to the Fullness of God in Leadership

An understanding of the "who" of God will not only transform the understanding of ecclesiology, but it will also fundamentally transform the understanding of the character and function of leadership. The unnecessary emphasis on self-preservation, and the selective reading of Scripture, has truncated the richness and creativity of the Holy Spirit's work among Mennonite Brethren in relation to leadership. This has resulted in an emphasis on the edification and pastoral care of

Mennonite Brethren families and their children. While this emphasis partially reflects the shepherding and covenanting nature of God, it does not give full expression to the nature of God who seeks his glory among the nations, offers the good news of salvation, cares for the harassed and helpless and empowers the weak for service.

The Triune God also inspires other forms of leadership. Apostles are carriers of the glory of God into yet unreached people groups or regions. They lay the foundations for the expansion of the church. Prophets hear the voice of God and speak forth his word to the church and the nations. Evangelists share the good news of Jesus through word and deed with the world. When these three kinds of leaders do not feel freedom within the body of Christ, the growth of God's kingdom is seriously undermined. At times, within the global Mennonite Brethren family, the exercise of pastor-teacher leadership has drifted from a Spirit-directed function within a wider ministry to being defined as a positional authority. When this happens, the experience of God's fullness in the life of Christ's body is stifled.

An undue emphasis on the maintenance of Mennonite Brethren communities of faith, and an unclear understanding of the spiritual authority of its pastors and elders, has exposed Mennonite Brethren churches to the misuse of authority. In Scripture, the Father delegates all authority to the Son. Jesus exercises his authority through service (John 13) and eventually makes the ultimate sacrifice for a fallen humanity (John 19). After his resurrection, he delegated all authority to his disciples (Matt. 28). They were to exercise their authority by making disciples of all nations in the power of the Spirit. The first disciples delegated their authority to new disciples. Church leadership exists to empower and equip the members of Christ's body so that the mystery of the gospel might be revealed to all peoples—God present in his people (Eph. 4:11-16; 3:7-10; Col.1:24-29).

The reluctance to embrace the fullness of Christian leadership not only reveals an inadequate understanding of God and leadership, but also the limitations of current training methodologies. Mennonite Brethren academic settings often reflect the fact that the pastor-teacher role is given greater value.[17] Students are seldom mentored in apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic ministries. Without these ministries, the churches become less visionary and hopeful in relation to their moment in history, less perceptive in their understanding of spiritual truth for their time, and less compassionate for those who live

outside of Christ. Most importantly, the churches fail to fulfill their purpose as the embodiment of God's love on earth.

All ministries empowered by the Spirit are essential for the church to mature and experience the fullness of God (Eph. 4:11-16). The first Anabaptists and the early Mennonite Brethren actively wrestled with God and Scripture within their historical and societal realities. Workers need to be trained in contexts where the realities of service to the world demand the emergence of all ministries of the Spirit. The way training is done is as important as the content of the instruction. The community of faith that is reaching out to the world in love should be the primary context for theological reflection and leadership discernment.

From Three Priorities to Holistic Expression of God's Glory

The early Mennonite Brethren were more "salvationist" in their theology, putting a priority on evangelism and church planting. Over time, kingdom and Trinitarian theologies were also proposed. Hans Kasdorf wrote:

> If the salvationist theology is rooted in the love of God and the cross of Christ, and if the kingdom theology is based on the Lordship of Christ and servanthood ministry, then the Trinitarian approach is anchored in both, God's love for the world and Christ's humble obedience to the Father. Thus when love is activated by obedience and obedient action is empowered by the Spirit, then the servant missionary can cross frontiers and witness with confidence to the world—witness by word and deed, by life and death.[18]

Over the past three decades, MB Mission has spoken of three priorities: evangelism and church planting, leadership training and social action.[19] This language of prioritization has not proven to be very helpful in the development of a theology that includes all of life. Prioritization leads to dichotomization and polarization. Social action has often been understood to be something subsidiary to gospel proclamation or necessary for entrance into a restricted access country.[20] The three priorities should be one integrated process, which reflects the fullness of God.

The delineation of three priorities has also proven to be incomplete in its description of the missional task. The missionary action is to form communities of followers around Jesus. Disciples of Jesus experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit on all levels: spiritual, emotional, physical, relational, familial, social and financial. Churches of the kingdom value evangelism and healing ministries as much as medical and educational ministries. Agricultural and business personnel who follow Jesus will walk full of the Spirit and share their faith with those they assist through both word and deed. There is no need for separation.[21] "Holistic church planting that transforms communities among the least reached," the vision statement of MB Mission, simply emanates from a life of communion with the Triune God.[22]

When the understanding of holistic ministry is grounded in the nature of God, there is no need to separate evangelism and church planting from justice and peace initiatives. Salvation, peace and justice are integrally connected in God's holiness. They are faces of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus. Followers of Jesus work for peace and justice in the world. They understand that individual and communal peace is only possible when Jesus himself is their peace and they lay down their lives for each other (Eph. 2).

From European and North American Mission to "Mission from Everywhere to Everywhere"

Mission is no longer from North America and Europe to the global south. Today, many ICOMB partner conferences are sending missionaries. The role of MB Mission, as the mission agency of the Canadian and American Mennonite Brethren Conferences, and the ICOMB partner conferences is to continue to send missionaries to the least-reached regions of the world. The great commission and the great commandment are as binding today as they were for the first disciples. Currently, MB Mission has long-term workers among least reached people groups in West Africa (Burkina Faso), North Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. ICOMB partner conferences are also sending missionaries to these regions.

As the Global Mission Alliance continues to take form, ICOMB has requested that MB Mission encourage the ICOMB partner conferences in their efforts to embrace their global mission, building their capacity through leadership equipping and community development

(Mission Capacity Building Service). As part of this service, MB Mission facilitates the church planting and mission sending initiatives of ICOMB partner conferences. From the perspective of MB Mission, the key questions are those of national or regional vision, ownership and initiative. It must be remembered that MB Mission's Mission Capacity Building Service is an interim step toward the full development of the Global Mission Alliance. This engagement as an ICOMB family is already leading to the formation of multiethnic, multicultural and multinational teams—a tremendous challenge, but also a wonderful expression of God's glory. As global mission has united the Canadian and American Conferences, MB Mission believes that ICOMB partner conferences will be united by participation in global mission together.

Each member conference is called to use its own particular gifts. As Mennonite Brethren contemplate the image of God in their brothers and sisters, they need to see each other in their wholeness. Sometimes the gift of the global south is considered to be people and spirituality, while the contribution of the European and North American churches is educational opportunities and financial resources. This rather superficial evaluation is not particularly helpful for the global ICOMB family. Mennonite Brethren should contemplate the work of the Holy Spirit in each other because they are all God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do his will in the world.

If the kingdom of God is to grow freely, Christians need to rely on the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, not human intelligence and economic power. For the ICOMB family to participate more fully in God's mission, all members must find their identity in Jesus. All must see themselves as full heirs of the kingdom of God—sons and daughters of the Father, sent out under Jesus' lordship, full of the Holy Spirit, with authority to proclaim and live the gospel among the nations. All members must look with faith to the same God who inspired and led the first Anabaptists and Mennonite Brethren.

Conclusion

The Trinity is not meant merely to be a theological confession, but rather a lived reality. Mennonite Brethren must grow in their love for the Father, for Jesus and for the Holy Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit together invite Christians into intimate communion with them and thereby to receive their heart for the world. The future road is one

of moving from an understanding of "the existence of three persons as one" to an immersion into the mystery of the Trinity, the Creator of all things who beckons people to join him on an eternal adventure.

At this time in Mennonite Brethren history, it is critical for the global Mennonite Brethren family to find its confessional and ecclesiological identity by answering the question of the "who" of mission. Mennonite Brethren theology must then shape the leadership and ministry patterns within this community of faith. The understanding and experience of God should shape the mission practice and relationships as a global Mennonite Brethren family.

In essence, the future of the Mennonite Brethren mission depends on a return to God, repentance for where the church has failed, humility before brothers and sisters, and a willingness to embrace all that God has for his people. The foundational question is not, "Who are the Mennonite Brethren?" The question is, "Who is the One inspiring the global Mennonite Brethren mission movement?" Mennonite Brethren serve a loving Father, under the lordship of a gracious Savior, with the presence and empowerment of a wonderful, engaging Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

1 G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1984), 12. See also Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1944); Hans Kasdorf, "The Church Concept of the Mennonite Brethren in Anabaptist Perspective" (M.A. thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1972); A.J. Klassen, ed. *The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J.B.* Toews (Hillsboro, Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1967); Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981); Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Star King Press, 1958); Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496-1561* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1974); Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner, eds. *Anabaptism and* Mission (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2007); C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, Rev. Student Ed. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995).

2 Hans Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking" (ThD. diss., University of South Africa, 1986), 15.

3 P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Howard Loewen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 563.

4 Maria Kroeker, *Ein Reiches Leben: Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Misonskirektors Jakob Kroeker* (Wustenrot, Wurttembureg: Kurt Reith Verlag, 1949), 78
5 N. I. Saloff-Astakhoff, *Christianity in Russia* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1941), 101.
6 Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking," 348-368.
7 Paul Hiebert, in Peters, *Foundations,* 1.
8 G. W. Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1947), 191-206.
9 MBMSI, "Vision for the Future: Goals for the 1990s" (Winnipeg: Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services, 1990), 8.
10 Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking," 455.
11 Abe Dueck, ed., *Mennonite Brethren Church around the World: Celebrating 150 Years* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2010).
12 MBMSI, "Vision for the Future," vii.
13 MBMSI, "Vision for the Future," 9-10.
14 See *Knowing and Living Your Faith: A Study of the Confession of Faith* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008) 123-129; *Confession of Faith of the U.S. and Canadian Conferences of the Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1999).
15 MBMSI, "Global Mission Guidelines: Vision, Priorities and Strategies for Century 21" (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services, 1997) 28-30.
16 Paul Hiebert, "Appendix A," in Peters, *Foundations,* 176.
17 MBMSI, "Global Mission Guidelines," 17.
18 Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking," 621.
19 The name was changed from Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services International (MBMSI) to MB Mission in 2011.
20 MBMSI, "Global Mission Guidelines," 19.
21 MBMSI, "Global Mission Guidelines," 16-19.
22 MB Mission website. http://www.mbmission.org/discover/vision-and-values/

“Truth and Method”

Lynn Jost

Introduction

The title of this chapter is copied from the title of the 1960 publication by Hans-Georg Gadamer, the phenomenological philosopher who described the act of interpreting as a “fusion of horizons.”[1] Interpretation seeks meaning with iterative dialogue between a text (representing tradition) and the text’s readers (contemporary audience). According to Gadamer, “horizon,” the context of meaning, is the gap between text and reader. “Fusion of horizons” integrates what is unfamiliar (ancient tradition) with what is known (contemporary world). Because Mennonite Brethren history and tradition is always in dialogue with the new situation, hermeneutics (interpretation) is never complete.[2]

Preaching “fuses horizons.” Preaching facilitates the play (the engagement) between the contemporary world and the ancient world of the text. In analyzing preaching the church refines its “fusion of horizons.” The research reported in this chapter enters the “play” between the biblical text (the church’s tradition) and the contemporary context (North American Mennonite Brethren twentieth-century preaching).

This chapter analyzes North American Mennonite Brethren preaching and is divided into three sections. First, I report observations from church bulletins about preaching in Mennonite Brethren congregations in the United States. Second, ten North American Mennonite Brethren preachers answered a questionnaire about biblical preaching and their own preaching plans and texts. Third, the article concludes with my analysis and recommendations based on the bulletin survey and the questionnaire of preachers.

Bulletin Analysis Project

My project began with analysis of church bulletins from six Mennonite Brethren congregations in the United States: three from the Pacific District Conference (Butler, Reedley, Lincoln Glen); two from the Southern District Conference (Hillsboro, Fairview); and one from the Central District Conference (Henderson). Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary students, Amy Stone and Matthew Insley, reviewed all the bulletins of each of the congregations annually in five-year intervals (between 1955 and 2009).[3] They recorded the sermon title, any scriptural text identified in the bulletin, the identity of the preacher, and a worship theme if mentioned (such as "New Member Sunday" or Advent series).

As the project began, I expected to see biblical texts identified with most sermons and that Pauline texts would dominate. I anticipated that the preaching of the pastor would be interrupted from time-to-time by both guest speakers and local church members. I expected preachers would be preponderantly male. While I was uncertain about what kind of changes might be evident, I was seeking to be alert to trends over time.

Summary of Findings

Preachers

The bulletins indicate that senior pastors are preaching less than they used to preach. The percentage of times that a senior pastor preached has declined from 80% in the 1950s to 63% in the last decade. The decline was very visible during the 1980s (when the senior pastor preached 62% of the time), bumped up to 70% in the 1990s, but declined again to 63% in the 2000s. Visiting preachers consistently preached about one-fifth of the Sundays (18% in the 1950s and 20% in the 2000s). In the 1990s, the number declined to 15%. In the churches studied there were no recorded sermons by interim pastors before 1980, however, after 2000 8% of all sermons were preached by interim pastors. Associate and youth pastors preached more than 10% of the sermons in the 1980s and 1990s, but that number declined to 6% in the 2000s. Bulletin research revealed that less than 1% of all sermons were preached by youth pastors before 1990. Associates were first recorded as preachers during the 1960s and 1970s when they

preached about 2-3% of sermons. Preaching by women comprised less than 0.5% of all preaching in the churches surveyed with a very slight increase from the 1970s to the present.

Texts

Bulletins do not always report which text is preached. The text was reported in bulletins 73% (Henderson) to 84% (Hillsboro) of the time in the Midwest churches and 40% (Butler) to 55% (Laurel Glen) of the time in California churches. While this limits the reliability of a comprehensive report of which texts are used, it will not prevent making some trend observations, assuming a random sample is available.

As expected, the Epistles were the most popular biblical texts with the Gospels running a close second. Seventy-three percent of the sermons came from the New Testament, with 36% from the Epistles, 30% from the Gospels and 5% from the book of Acts. The Old Testament accounts for the remaining 27% of recorded sermon texts, including the historical books (13%), prophets (nearly 7%), Psalms (4%), Apocalyptic texts (nearly 3%), and the Pentateuch and wisdom literature (about 1% each).

There is some variance of text selection over time. The dominance of the Epistles was most pronounced in the 1970s and the 1990s, when over 40% of all recorded sermon texts were from the Epistles, compared to less than 30% of the sermons preached during the 1960s and 2000s. In the decade of the 2000s, the Gospels exceeded the Epistles by almost 10%. When the Acts of the Apostles are included with the Gospels, they account for more than 45% of all sermon tests. In the 1960s and the 1980s the number of sermons from the Epistles and the Gospels was almost identical.

Among Old Testament texts, the historical books accounted for approximately 10% of all sermons in every decade, except the 1960s, when more than 20% of all recorded sermon texts were from historical books. Recorded sermon texts from the Old Testament prophetic books total less than 7% with the percentage approaching 10% during the 1960s. Psalms account for 4-6% of recorded sermon texts in each decade. The Pentateuch and the wisdom books combined account for about only 2% of all recorded sermon texts.

Three churches, Reedley, Fairview and Butler (from lowest to highest), report the highest ratio of Epistle to Gospel texts ranging

from a difference of 13% to 19%. Two churches (Lincoln Glen and Henderson) report nearly identical percentages (differences of less than 1% and less than 4% respectively). At Hillsboro, the Gospels were preached almost 9% more than the Epistles. The Old Testament historical books account for 16% of recorded sermon texts at Henderson and Butler, which is somewhat higher than the overall mean.

Church Calendar

The researchers also observed the attention given to the liturgical calendar. Bulletins (and worship themes and sermons) gave careful attention to Christmas, Palm Sunday and Easter. In general, there is a shift over time to increased attention to the church year and the seasons, first, of Advent, and, later and less universally, of Lent. Increasingly, Pentecost was also noted as the day's theme. The "Hallmark" holidays also received attention, particularly Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Father's Day and Valentine's Day.

Further analysis indicates the following about the church calendar. Christmas, Easter and Palm Sunday were always celebrated in each church. Most of these days include sermons on the theme (occasionally there is a choir cantata in place of a sermon). Advent, first informally preparing for Christmas and later identifying the season as such, began to be more generally celebrated by the 1970s, although Hillsboro and Henderson already had Advent themes in 1960. Advent was specifically identified in each congregation from 1980 on. Lent was first mentioned in the Hillsboro bulletin in 1960, but was only consistently celebrated as a festival after 1985. The term was rarely mentioned in any of the other bulletins, although occasionally these churches seemed to have sermonic themes that lead toward Easter. Pentecost was celebrated consistently in all but Fairview. Ascension Day was mentioned at least once and Harvest Mission Festivals are common.

Several ministries or religious themes were also given attention. Publication Sunday was a fairly common special day in several churches during the 1960s and 1970s. Peace Sunday was celebrated several times and Henderson even celebrated Soil Stewardship Sunday in 1960 and 1965. The 100th and the 120th anniversaries of the Mennonite Brethren church were celebrated in different congregations. Gideons, the persecuted church, tracts, national Sunday school, child

evangelism, world literature, CROP and MCC were also highlighted as special days.

National and "Hallmark" holidays were also celebrated in some of the congregations. Thanksgiving was celebrated as consistently as Christmas and Easter. Valentine's Day was celebrated more than once and in more than one congregation. Mother's and Father's Day were quite consistently identified. Children's Day and Youth Day were also common. The identification of the Fourth of July and Memorial Day was characteristic of Fairview but rarely if ever mentioned in other congregations. In Hillsboro a series on the Beatitudes once resulted in a sermon on the peacemakers preached on July 3.

Analysis of Bulletin Survey

Preachers

I find the trend toward pastors sharing the pulpits with other preachers very positive.[4] The growing number of voices reinforces the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. This move also portends an act of self-care that will protect the mental and spiritual health of the pastor. I was surprised and encouraged to discover that the preaching done by denominational leaders and other guests continues at the same pace as in earlier decades, following a decline in the 1990s. This finding, if reliable, runs counter to anecdotal reports that fewer pulpits are being made available to guests. Perhaps the tendency to include more preaching by staff persons would indicate that larger churches might be reserving the pulpit for staff persons and limiting the number of outside preaching guests. If staff persons with less theological and homiletical preparation than senior pastors are preaching more frequently, new opportunities for training arise. An important discipling ministry of the local pastor could include gathering prospective preachers to give them help in preparing, delivering and evaluating sermons.

Texts

The preponderance of New Testament texts, particularly the emphasis on the Epistles, raises questions about text selection. The researchers noted that 36% of all sermons in the survey came from the Epistles even though the Epistles make up only 9% of the canon. For

many, the "canon within the canon" appears to be the Epistles, primarily the Pauline Epistles.

Church Calendar

The tendency toward more attention to the biblically-based church year is one which I applaud. Including the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Pentecost encourages discipleship and biblical faithfulness. I am concerned about the susceptibility of Mennonite Brethren churches to the influences of nationalism and popular holidays in shaping the liturgical life of the church. Worship is an opportunity for the church to shape the identity of its congregants. When Mennonite Brethren worship using the language, values and myths of common culture, they reduce the radical message of the Bible. When they use the biblical story as their guide, Mennonite Brethren help create a consciousness of a community that lives within the biblical context.

Survey of Contemporary Preaching

Although originally I had planned to base this article solely on the bulletin reports, I found myself curious about how these historical trends might compare to contemporary preaching among Mennonite Brethren preachers who have a reputation for preaching well. I sent selected preachers a brief questionnaire to compare their opinions to the bulletin reports. Because the bulletin survey revealed information about biblical texts and the frequency with which sermon texts were identified in bulletins, I asked these preachers whether they considered themselves biblical in their preaching and whether there are other terms that might identify their preaching. I also invited them to reflect on what is biblical preaching. Finally, I asked them about the biblical text of their next sermon. A review of their feedback provides additional insight into Mennonite Brethren preaching practices. It complements the statistical information gleaned from the bulletin study with more anecdotal reports about current practice and attitudes.

Ten preachers responded to the questions. Each considers himself or herself to be a biblical preacher. Additional self-descriptors include such labels as storyteller, conversationalist, real and passionate, teacher (rather than preacher), exegetical, creative, using visual images and declarative.

When asked to identify the next sermon text the person was planning to preach, the following biblical books were mentioned: 1 Timothy, Philippians, Luke (twice), 1 Samuel, Revelation, 2 Kings (twice), Psalms, Colossians and Jeremiah. Reduced to the categories of the bulletin survey, one can see that this group of preachers will use Old Testament historical books and Pauline Epistles each for 27% of the sermons, Gospels 18%, and the Psalms, prophets, and Revelation each 9%. When compared to the longitudinal study, this snapshot indicates an increased interest in the Old Testament, a decline in the preaching of the Gospels and continued priority given to Paul.

When I asked these preachers to define biblical preaching, the answers varied. One person suggested that some might define biblical preaching as "truth," but he preferred to define it as "a sermon that both preacher and hearers recognize as rooted in the Bible or a biblical passage." Two respondents said simply that biblical preaching is using the Scriptures as the text or starting point and one of them went on to describe the exegetical method used. A scholar-preacher agreed that biblical preaching usually begins with the text, but added that the preacher helps the listener discern what the text implies in terms of response. This person warned that other texts should be engaged to a modest degree, sparingly, to avoid neutralizing the scandal of the particular textual message. Another emphasized that biblical preaching allows the Word of God to come alive and demands that the preacher's objective be "life change." "Biblical preaching," said another, "is preaching which teaches biblical truths...It usually refers directly to a biblical text but not necessarily so. It must expose biblical truth."

One person responded with ten marks of biblical preaching: 1) the preacher/teacher applies the lesson to his/her life before teaching others; 2) prepares in a prayerful, Spirit-led manner; 3) preaches for transformation; 4) allows the text to drive the lesson; 5) teaches the text in its context; 6) employs a broad repertoire of biblical themes; 7) uses corroborating texts; 8) speaks the language and knows the culture of the audience; 9) inspires rather than bores; and 10) ultimately points to Jesus.

An elder statesman responded to the question by saying that, narrowly defined, biblical preaching expounds, proclaims and applies a biblical text. In a more expanded definition, it is preaching aligned with the overall biblical message, which allows for topical preaching, preaching entire biblical books and biblical character studies.

One said that a biblical preacher is one "who seeks to sit under the authority and direction of the Scriptures, articulating as best s/he can what the text meant to the original reader/listener, and then seeking to take that meaning and build a bridge to the local context in a way that accurately reflects what the original scriptures meant and how they are to inform, transform and direct our present life." This person added, "Sometimes I have heard people speak of biblical preaching in the sense of a form or style of preaching as opposed to one's position when approaching the Scriptures. The issue is not "style of message" as much as allowing the Scriptures to speak to the church."

Another stated, "Biblical preaching is like planting seeds that can grow and bear fruit in people's lives. It is more than just quoting a lot of verses. It is more than explaining a text. It is making the Word come off the page, igniting its message in the minds and hearts and lives of preacher and listener alike."

When asked about text selection, the respondents offered a variety of replies. One reviewed five years of preaching and listed nineteen biblical book series and eleven topical series, and for the current year assigned four weeks to Easter, four weeks to Advent, and a week to Thanksgiving. Another preacher, who is no longer in a pastoral position, preferred to have a text assigned, but also mentioned the liturgical calendar. Another mentioned the common lectionary as well as a biblical book or a theme growing out of a small discernment group. Another identified the lectionary as a source for Advent and Lent. Another spoke of being attentive to the church calendar as well as "reading" the needs of the congregation and working from insights gleaned in devotional reading and memory work.

One preacher mentioned that a critical part of the process for choosing sermon texts was to ask Jesus to speak by the power of the Holy Spirit to direct the preachers to what Jesus wants to share with his body. "He is the Head of the Church and we are just following His leadership." One playfully described the operation of a spinning wheel with the names of the biblical books, but then suggested annual planning, the Holy Spirit's guidance, exposure to books and other sources, guidance from elders and staff, and cultural influences. Two specifically encouraged preachers to be attentive to current events, particularly those that dominate public attention.

Analysis and Recommendations

As noted in the introduction, Gadamer describes the hermeneutical challenge as a "fusion of horizons." The homiletic task is to bring the biblical text into conversation with the contemporary context, resulting in a fusion of horizons, ancient and contemporary. James McClendon provides an Anabaptist perspective to the hermeneutical task. He articulates a "vision [in which] Scripture effects a link between the church of the apostles and our own."[5] He expresses the hermeneutical principle as "shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community," described elsewhere as a "this is that" hermeneutic.[6] Whereas Gadamer describes the "play" between horizons, McClendon uses the notion of a scriptural "link" between the ancient and the contemporary community. For McClendon the link brings to the fore the biblical story, missional responsibility of costly witness, discipleship and community.[7]

Sermon analysis examines the dialogue between horizons or the recognition of the link between communities. The research methods employed provide the data for this examination. Other means of homiletic analysis yield additional data, but the purpose of this article is to analyze Mennonite Brethren preaching using the data at hand.

The analysis that follows addresses what the bulletin survey and preachers' questionnaire reveal about the play ("link" to use McClendon's term) between text and context, using the categories of preacher, text and worship theme/church calendar.

1. The preacher as the hermeneutical leader has a primary role in connecting the preaching community to the biblical text. Two recommendations grow out of the analysis of the research data.

a. Sharing the pulpit is positive. Balancing the preaching of the pastor, the pastoral staff and other local preachers, along with guest preachers, is good for congregants and for pastors. The result of a shared pulpit is an expanded dialogue about how the contemporary congregational community is aware that it is also the primitive community and the eschatological community (McClendon's terms). The dialogue between horizons is facilitated by a fuller understanding of the primitive community, an understanding that is facilitated by theological study. Preachers with theological preparation should work with others to help build this capacity.

b. The paucity of preaching by women is scandalous and needs to change. Scripture describes contexts in which women who have adequate preparation are free to speak prophetic words and to teach. I find it grievous that less than 1% of sermons are preached by women. If local pastors will include congregational and staff members in their preaching discipleship groups, this may provide a new avenue for women preachers. It is incumbent upon the church to invite all of those upon whom the Spirit inspires for prophetic utterance the opportunity to speak (see Joel 2 and Acts 2).

2. Biblical preaching includes, but goes beyond, starting with a biblical text. Biblical preaching brings the preacher under the authority of the Bible. Biblical preaching, while proclaiming a single text, must be consistent with a thorough biblical theology. Biblical preaching creates for the community of God a new imagination of the community that God is creating through Jesus.

The biblical text links the contemporary community to the primitive community. The sermon gives voice to the play between the biblical tradition and the present. The bulletin research reveals the historical experience of which biblical texts are prioritized. The questionnaire illumines not only current preaching emphases, but also what some Mennonite Brethren preachers understand biblical preaching to be.

a. When the whole biblical canon is engaged in the preaching task, the contemporary community links more completely with the ancient one. When one part of the canon is privileged at the expense of the rest of the canon, the link may be blurred. Preaching primarily from any single genre tends to distort the church's understanding of God's design. Neglecting parts of the canon truncates the church's understanding of God's design as well as the saving work of Jesus.

The biblical account is a narrative. According to some interpreters, the Bible is a story that comes in six acts (creation, fall, God's work in redeeming a people, Jesus, the church—which is the part of the story in which we live, and consummation.)[8] As is true of interpreting stories generally, Mennonite Brethren understand the full narrative only by experiencing every one of the acts. While the story may ebb and flow, each of the acts is essential in shaping the community of faith. Limiting the selection of biblical texts to chapters four and five truncates the story and reduces the claim on the part of Mennonite Brethren to be a fully biblical people. I would encourage preaching from each of these acts more than a single time each year.

Within these six canonical acts additional balance is needed. Generally, more attention to Old Testament texts would improve canonical balance. In particular, the books of the Pentateuch, the prophets and the wisdom literature are underrepresented in preaching. The story in Genesis is important because three of the acts are found in this book. In Exodus, the story presents the primary salvific act of the Old Testament and the giving of the Law, a primary identifier of God's people. The prophets speak to issues of international justice as well as the experience of exile. Wisdom literature is particularly related to creation, to the earth and to skillful living.

I commend the trend toward more preaching of narrative texts, including the Gospels as well as the Old Testament historical books. Anabaptist emphases on Jesus and discipleship are reinforced by preaching from the Gospels. Preaching Old Testament stories addresses issues of justice and peacemaking as well as personal relationships.

The ICOMB (International Community of Mennonite Brethren) Confession of Faith provides a model for text selection.[9] The Confession has two parts. The first is the narrative of salvation history. The second part makes five statements about the church—people of the Bible, of a new way of life, of reconciliation, of covenant community and of hope. Using the narrative categories engages the preacher and the community with primary events in the story of God and God's people. Using the ecclesial statements and the footnoted biblical references helps the preacher emphasize primary identity markers for the people of God.

b. Mennonite Brethren preachers claim to preach biblically. Mennonite Brethren preachers claim to allow the text to speak without imposing a preconceived structure or theology onto the text. Although at one time I aimed to preach from a purely biblical perspective, I find myself increasingly less convinced that a neutral stance is possible. My sense is that preachers inevitably bring to the text not only their own personality and context, but also their particular theological grid.

I suggest that Mennonite Brethren preachers choose a theological perspective that grows consciously and deliberately out of a biblical Anabaptist theology. The theology that I propose is largely consistent with that of McClendon referenced above. The theological perspective needs a healthy balance of the first three narrative acts with the last three narrative acts. The first three acts tell the Old Testament story of creation (including wisdom literature), fall (including stories of sin

and exile), and the story of God's people. Following Elmer Martens, God's design in saving Israel in the Old Testament can be outlined with four primary themes: deliverance, covenant community, knowledge of God and abundant life.[10] Preachers using these basic themes as the basis of their biblical preaching will be connected to the story of God's relationship with the people of God.

The final three acts also need to be preached with some balance. Preaching Jesus requires preaching the Gospels. Central to Jesus' teaching is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), the great commission, and the great commandment. The Epistles link the story of Jesus to the life of the church. Preaching biblically recognizes the community orientation of the Gospels, Acts and Epistles. Preaching eschatologically emphasizes the in-breaking reign of God and the resurrection life promised by Jesus.

3. Emphasizing the liturgical year links the contemporary community to the biblical community. The story of Jesus is told annually via the liturgical calendar. Year one moves from Christ's coming (Advent, Christmas and Epiphany) to his passion (Lent and Easter) to the life of the church (Pentecost), culminating in Christ the King Sunday. Giving attention to the church year, particularly Lent and Advent, is a positive sign and a practice to be encouraged. An emphasis on other special events and national holidays may open the way to idolatrous syncretism.

Conclusion

This project began with a study of the bulletins of six Mennonite Brethren congregations from the United States to discover what the bulletins communicated about preaching. Observation of the bulletins indicates a biblical focus, a shared pulpit and increasing attention to the liturgical calendar. The project grew to include a questionnaire to which ten Mennonite Brethren preachers responded with their own definitions of biblical preaching and an indication of the texts from which they are preaching. Recommendations for the future of Mennonite Brethren preaching include expanding the open pulpit to include women preachers, balancing canonical choices with more preaching from the Gospels and the Old Testament, being intentional in preaching from a biblical theological model, and expanding use of the liturgical calendar. These recommendations are intended to strengthen the play between the textual tradition and the contemporary congregation.

Endnotes

1 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, Continuum, 2000).
2 Malpas, Jeff, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, http://www.plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/gadamer/.
3 These six churches were chosen by virtue of their significance as MB churches during this time period. The availability of bulletins is not consistent. Some begin as early as 1955 and others in later years (as late as 1970). Some church bulletins are no longer available for the last decade (the 2000s).
4 I am indebted to the researchers for their significant insights with the analysis and recommendations.
5 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 31.
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8 Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 133.
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Mennonite Brethren in Canada: Findings of the 2009 Canadian Evangelical Churches Study

Sam Reimer

From the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada in 1888 to roughly the middle of the twentieth century, Mennonite Brethren in Canada were a separated people, maintaining their distinctiveness through communal, rural living and the German language. Since at least the 1960s, however, Mennonite Brethren have actively participated in the larger evangelical movement. Their evangelistic fervor, biblicism and emphasis on a conversion experience meant that they had much in common with fellow Canadian evangelicals.[1] Mennonite Brethren played a key role in the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in 1964, symbolizing the importance of their evangelical identity.[2]

Today, Canadian Mennonite Brethren have about 40,000 adherents in some 250 churches, mostly in the West. Denominational statistics indicate that Mennonite Brethren are the largest Mennonite denomination in Canada (slightly larger than Mennonite Church Canada) and one of the ten largest evangelical denominations in Canada, in terms of number of churches. There are roughly 11,000 evangelical congregations in Canada, comprising about one-third of all the 30,000 or so congregations nationally.[3] Yet little is known about these churches or about Canadian evangelical churches in general. In this paper, I will analyze the demographics, identity and programs/activities of Mennonite Brethren churches in Canada. I will also provide a snapshot of nearly 400 other evangelical congregations for comparison.

In the Canadian Evangelical Churches Study (CECS), the lead pastors (that is, the senior or sole pastor) of 478 evangelical congregations were interviewed in 2009.[4] Phone interviews with 100 youth/

children's pastors in these same congregations were also completed. Prior to the phone interviews, another fifty face-to-face interviews were conducted with lead pastors from across Canada (Maritimes, Toronto area, Calgary area and Vancouver area). I will focus on data from the 478 lead pastor interviews. Eighty-seven of the lead pastor interviews were completed in Mennonite Brethren churches. The four other denominations studied were The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), Christian Reformed Churches (CRC), Convention Baptist Churches (all four conventions), and Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). These represent the largest denominations in the Pentecostal, Reformed, Mennonite, Holiness and Baptist traditions within Canadian evangelicalism. These denominations include about 3,100 congregations, or roughly one-third of all the evangelical congregations in Canada. The response rate for these interviews was roughly 40%.[5] To begin, I will present information about the demographics of Mennonite Brethren congregations themselves, including the year they were founded, size and growth rates. This is followed by the demographics of the people that attend these congregations.

Demographics - Congregations

The average size of Mennonite Brethren congregations is somewhat larger than congregations in the five other evangelical denominations in the comparison. In Table 1, the average and median attendance for Mennonite Brethren churches are given. The median represents the midpoint (the middle church if all churches were lined up according to size) and is the better estimate because the mathematical average (mean) is easily skewed by very large churches in the sample. Based on denominational records (from the five denominations), with comparisons to the CECS data, the best estimate for the median size of the churches for the five evangelical denominations is 100 regular participants (typical weekly attendance, including adults and children) and the average attendance is 180.[6] The Mennonite Brethren are larger, with a median attendance of roughly 140 and average attendance of 255. The Baptist and Pentecostal congregations tend to be smaller, partly because they are more likely to be rural congregations. Those denominations with more churches in Western Canada tend to have larger congregations, with the CRC congregations being the largest. The Mennonite Brethren have some larger churches than the

CRC, so they have a slightly higher average but a somewhat lower median than the CRC.

Table 1 - Demographics of Congregations

	MB	Others
Average size	255	180
Median size	140	100
Median growth per year (per congregation)	10	9
% of congregations who have planted another church or site	21.8	22.0
% of congregations in a metropolitan area	54.0	38.4
Median age of congregation	30	50
% of congregations that meet in a church building	72.4%	89.3%

Source: CECS 2009

Median growth per year refers to the median number of attendees gained in 2008 (number joined minus number left/deceased), roughly 10 people per congregation. Forty-five percent of the Mennonite Brethren pastors interviewed said their church was growing, 20% said their church was decreasing and the remaining 35% said there was no change over the past 2 years. This was also typical of the other denominations.

Several authors have noted the vitality of evangelical congregations and their importance to overall numerical success of Canadian evangelicalism.[7] However, research on evangelical churches in Calgary found that only about 10% of evangelical church growth is actually new converts and the vast majority of newcomers are already believers from other churches.[8] My findings are similar. Mennonite Brethren pastors indicated that their median number of new members was twenty in 2008 (eight became official members, twelve were regular attendees but not members), and the median number of attendees lost was ten (moved away or deceased). Of the twenty new people, the median number of new converts was two, or 10%. Again, these medians are very close to those of the other four denominations.

One popular strategy for growth with all five denominations, particularly in the last two decades, is church planting. The Mennonite Brethren began their Key Cities Initiative (KCI) in 1998 with an eleven-year strategy to plant churches in Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver as well as in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

More recently, denominational leaders are encouraging churches to have a "multiplying mindset," where the focus has moved to healthy churches planting churches, and less on hiring planters to start churches. About 22% of congregations in the sample have started a new church or another site of their church. The Mennonite Brethren are typical here as well.

Regarding location, over half the Mennonite Brethren congregations in the sample were in metropolitan areas (defined by Statistics Canada as having a population of at least 100,000). This is a much higher percentage than other denominations. The metropolitan location of Mennonite Brethren congregations is strongly correlated with the age of the congregation, and younger congregations are less likely to be in rural areas or locales with shrinking populations. Those denominations with older congregations—particularly the Baptists and Pentecostals—have a higher percentage of congregations in the Maritimes and Ontario, whereas Mennonite Brethren are predominately in the more recently populated Western provinces. On average, congregations were founded in 1925 in Atlantic Canada and 1974 in B.C., with an overall average of 1962 across Canada. Another contributor is the Mennonite Brethren KCI, which targeted metropolitan areas. Mennonite Brethren congregations are less likely to meet in a church building, which is also related to their age. There are as many Mennonite Brethren congregations that meet in schools and community centers as the other four denominations combined.

Demographically, Mennonite Brethren congregations seem to be in a good position overall. Larger congregations are more stable, and those located in metropolitan areas are more likely to have the edge as cities continue to grow. Larger urban congregations in the study tend to have a higher percentage of well educated and wealthy attendees (according to pastor estimates) which makes for financial stability, although they also tend to have more free-riders (those who don't contribute or volunteer) than smaller, rural congregations. Congregations that do not meet in church buildings are naturally younger and smaller, and are more likely to be urban and ethnic or multi-racial. Interestingly, pastors without church buildings tend to have a more positive opinion of their congregations. These congregations may have less stability, but they may gain something in flexibility and energy.

Demographics - Attendees

The demographics of the people in Mennonite Brethren church pews are reflective of the location of their congregations. They are slightly above average in education and income, and are slightly younger than the average. All of these are correlated with their metropolitan location (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Demographics of Attendees in Evangelical Churches

Attribute (average % in the churches)	MB	Other
Below 18 years	23.0	21.2
18–29 years	16.4	14.6
30–64 years	45.3	44.0
Above 65 years	16.0	21.3
High school or less	42.0	52.3
4-year university degree or more	41.0	33.4
Grad degree or more	8.3	7.8
Below $25,000 family income	12.7	16.0
Above $100,000 family income	15.2	13.1
Attendee not yet converted to Christ	9.6	8.6
Attend a small group monthly or more	46.5	34.1
Recent immigrant (came to Canada in last 5 years)	5.2	5.9
% Asian	8.4	8.0
% Latin American	1.8	1.6
% Black/African	1.8	4.3
% Aboriginal	1.4	3.1

MBs are more likely to attend small groups in their churches than other evangelicals, and Mennonite Brethren pastors seem to prioritize them. This may be related to the Mennonite emphasis on community, which has marked Mennonite Brethren historically.

Regarding ethnic diversity, Mennonite Brethren are less diverse than the C&MA but more diverse than the CRC. The Baptists and

PAOC have a higher percentage of Black/African congregants, while the PAOC and C&MA have more Aboriginal attendees. The C&MA have the most Asians, followed by the Mennonite Brethren. Mennonite Brethren represent the middle of the pack when it comes to ethnic diversity. Their metropolitan location gives them an advantage that may be offset by the remnants of a historical tendency toward communal insularity and Dutch-German-Russian ethnicity.

Identity

The dual identity as Anabaptists and evangelicals has long marked Mennonite Brethren. However, their weakening Anabaptist identity was already a concern in the 1960s and 70s. The strength of the evangelical subculture in North America and other homogenizing forces within evangelicalism (like the transience and denominational switching of evangelicals) mitigate against the preservation of denominational distinctives like peacemaking and communal living. In Canada, a relatively peaceful existence weakens the salience of their peace-making stance, and most Mennonite Brethren have also moved away from communal living and are fully integrated into modern society, weakening the historic deference given to communal authority. As illustrated in Table 3, Mennonite Brethren (81.6%) are similar to C&MA (86%) and PAOC (83%) in having a high percentage of pastors who said the evangelical label describes their church "very well," which is above the CRC (44%). Only 40% of Mennonite Brethren pastors identified "extremely or very closely" with their denomination, which is the lowest level among all five denominations. This may mean that pastors/churches do not hold strongly to their Anabaptist identity, or it may mean they do not feel a strong affinity with the denomination itself. Other identities in Table 3 are listed from highest to lowest based on level of identification among the churches.

Table 3 - Identity

% "describes congregation very well"	MB	Other
Evangelical	81.6	70.6
Missional	46.0	36.8
Purpose-driven	19.5	16.4
Charismatic	6.9	14.3
Seeker-sensitive	14.9	11.5
Fundamentalist	3.4	12.4
Emerging/emergent	10.3	6.9
Liturgical	3.4	5.1
Cell church	2.3	4.1
Identify with their denomination (extremely or very closely)	39.6	54.2

After evangelical, Mennonite Brethren pastors identified their churches as "missional" (46%) at a higher percentage than all denominations except the PAOC (57%). Advocates of the missional church seek to take the church back to Jesus' mission to reach their community and world. They focus on the needs external to the church by incarnating Christ to their neighbors, and are less focused on needs and program development inside the church. Key spokespersons include Alan Hirsch, Darrell Guder, Tim Keller and others.[9]

Ranked third is "purpose-driven," an identity that follows the strategy laid out in *The Purpose Driven Church*, a best-selling book by Rick Warren.[10] The church, argues Warren, needs to align its purpose with the five biblical purposes of the church, the result of which will be a healthy congregation that is growing in depth and numbers. Here is Warren's definition:

> Purpose Driven is a church health model that provides your pastoral team with a unique, biblically-based approach to establishing, transforming, and maintaining a balanced, growing congregation that seeks to fulfill the God-given purposes of worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions.[11]

While the five denominations ranked the charismatic identity fourth, this is mostly because of the strong identification among the PAOC (47%). For Mennonite Brethen, it was ranked sixth. The char-

ismatic movement is a transdenominational movement that began in the 1960s among Catholics but spread quickly to many Protestant denominations. It emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit to empower the individual and the church for service and evangelism. They emphasize the miraculous and surprising movements of the Spirit, and believe that tongues, miracles and prophecy are still intended for the church today.

Fifteen percent of Mennonite Brethren identified with the seeker-sensitive movement, which is probably best typified by Bill Hybel's Willowcreek Church. Seeker-sensitive churches attempt to provide a welcoming environment for the un-churched by offering contemporary worship as a polished multi-media presentation in a non-threatening atmosphere.

The fact that Mennonite Brethren congregations are younger on average may help explain why their pastors identify more strongly with the emerging church, because emerging churches tend to attract younger, postmodern congregants. One in ten Mennonite Brethren (and PAOC) pastors identify strongly with this movement, compared to 3% of Baptist churches. Theologian Scot McKnight says this diverse movement is marked by five characteristics: prophetic (or at least provocative), postmodern (they resonate with some aspects of postmodernity and tend to minister to postmoderns), praxis-oriented (missional, active in the world), post-evangelical (at least in the sense of post-systematic theology and exclusive boundaries between Christians and non-Christians), and political (they lean to the left).[12]

Only a few Mennonite Brethren pastors identified strongly with the "liturgical," "cell church," or "fundamentalist" labels. Twenty-five percent of PAOC pastors thought that "fundamentalist" identified their church very well, followed by 12% of Baptists and Alliance pastors. Only three Mennonite Brethren pastors and only one CRC pastor felt "fundamentalist" described their churches very well. In comparison, eighteen CRC pastors identified as liturgical along with only five other congregations (three of which were Mennonite Brethren). Similarly, only eighteen pastors identified strongly with the cell church movement. The cell church movement may have its strongest proponent in Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. In the model, the backbone of the church is its evangelistic and discipleship-oriented small groups. While the C&MA was mostly likely to identify as cell church (seven pastors), the percentages were too small for accurate comparisons.

Priorities

One would expect a church's identity to affect its priorities. For example, if a church identifies itself as "missional," it should also prioritize outreach to its community, and thus would make some organized effort to do so. This tends to be case. Churches who identify as "seeker-sensitive" are more likely to prioritize "providing a worship service that is welcoming and comfortable to non-churched visitors," just as "missional" churches are more likely to prioritize "serving the poor and needy in the community" and "maintaining an active evangelism and outreach program."

What do Mennonite Brethren congregations prioritize? Pastors were asked this question: "As you know, congregations operate according to certain values or priorities, even if they are not explicitly stated. In your view, what are the actual priorities of this church, based on how they function, even if they are different from your priorities?" Table 4 lists the priorities based on the percentage of pastors who said the item was a "very high priority."

Table 4 - Priorities

% "very high priority"	MB	Others
Faith development of children and youth	84.9	79.8
Providing a welcoming worship service	62.8	61.4
Encouraging people to serve in their gifts	74.4	56.8
Strengthening marriages/families	53.5	52.4
Preserving traditional morals	40.7	51.9
Building volunteer leadership	54.7	47.1
Providing care for members	53.5	44.8
Promoting deeper spirituality/disciplines	43.0	46.0
Active evangelism	48.8	43.2
Promoting cooperation between churches	44.2	35.5
Serving the poor and needy	36.0	33.5
Teaching the theological distinctives of our religious tradition	18.6	30.7
Protecting church people from the world	20.9	27.6
Enhancing beauty of church building and grounds	16.3	21.0
Preserving ethnic culture or language	5.8	8.4
Helping members get ahead financially	4.7	4.6

The faith development of youth and children is the highest priority for both Mennonite Brethren and other evangelical groups. Bibby has noted that evangelicals excel at keeping the youth, a key to their numerical growth.[13] Mennonite Brethren are ten percentage points above the next highest denomination (the PAOC) in their emphasis on encouraging congregants to serve in their gifts. They are also slightly above average in building volunteer leadership, providing care for members, engaging in active evangelism and cooperating with other churches. Some of these priorities dovetail nicely with the denominational priorities set out in Regenerate 21-01, which seeks to realize the dynamics of the first century church in twenty-first century Canada. The main initiatives include church health, leadership development, and reaching out through evangelistic strategies and new church plants. In contrast, the Mennonite Brethren are below average in prioritizing "preserving traditional moral and family values" and "protecting people in the church from negative influences in the world." These items are correlated with fundamentalism, an identity that is rare among MBs (see Table 3). Finally, it is noteworthy that Mennonite Brethren are least likely to consider their theological distinctives a "very high priority" (18.6%), which is lower than all the other denominations by at least seven percentage points. This may be an indication that their generic evangelical identity trumps their Anabaptist identity, or that Mennonite Brethren core convictions are not salient to the churches.

Programs/activities

In turn, priorities should translate into programs or initiatives that are internally (discipleship) and externally (evangelical, social action) focused. I start with internal programs. Table 5 shows the percentage of churches that have each internal program. The numbers in parentheses are the median number of children/youth in religious education classes in a typical week.

Table 5 - Internal Programs

% of churches that have the program	MB	Other
Bible studies	98.9	95.9
Children religious education classes (0-12 years)	95.4 (30)	94.9 (25)
Prayer meetings	93.1	92.6
Organized way to help members	88.5	85.9
Marriage classes, premarital counseling	80.5	77.0
Baptism classes	90.1	73.9
Purpose of church discussions	73.6	74.4
Organized way to follow up on newcomers	72.4	66.2
New member classes	71.3	65.5
Spirituality/spiritual disciplines groups	70.1	60.4
Youth religious education classes (13-18 years), not youth group	63.2 (15)	61.6 (15)
Organized way to reconnect past attendees	55.2	54.7
Music ministry/worship leader training	51.7	52.9
Missionary or mission teams preparation	44.8	53.4
Religious education teacher training	49.4	50.1
Evangelism classes	39.1	42.7
Spiritual gifts classes	33.3	39.9
Parenting classes	34.5	33.5

What is most surprising about Table 5 is the lack of differences between the denominations in terms of internal programs. While churches vary greatly in size, mission, region and ethnicity, nearly all have Bible studies, religious education for children and prayer meetings. While there are very few important differences between denominations, there are a few where Mennonite Brethren stand out. Mennonite Brethren are more likely to have baptismal classes than the four other denominations, even the Baptists. They are also most likely to have groups that focus on the spiritual disciplines or spirituality. This is true even though they do not prioritize the spiritual disciplines above the other denominations (see Table 4). Moreover, Mennonite Brethren congregations are slightly less likely to offer "classes focused on discovering and using spiritual gifts" even though they are more likely to encourage serving according to one's spiritual gifts (see Table 4).

Tables 6 and 7 below are divided between externally focused activities that are evangelism-oriented and those that are service-oriented.

Of course, the line between these activities is fuzzy, since for many evangelicals, service and evangelism are not distinguishable in terms of activity, and they are mutually supportive. Nonetheless, I attempt to separate those activities that are primarily about evangelism, or attracting people to the church, from those that are more specifically focused on meeting the needs (physical, emotional, relational) of those in the community. Note that all of the activities in the tables benefited people in the local community who were not part of the church (including the Bible studies/small groups).

In the Canadian context, where tolerance and multiculturalism are valued, aggressive methods of evangelism strike most people (including evangelicals) as un-Canadian. As a result, evangelicals have steered away from confrontational methods like door-to-door or "street" evangelism (including the use of street drama and singing), and have replaced them with methods that emphasize building relationships and meeting felt needs (see Table 6).

Table 6 - Outreach - Evangelism

% of churches that have the program	MB	Others
Foreign missions program	81.6	83.9
Ad in phonebook or paper	73.6	77.2
Website	83.9	71.6
Acts of kindness	69.0	60.9
BBQs, block parties, carnivals	67.8	58.6
DVBS	57.5	58.6
Distributing flyers	51.7	50.1
Service at another location	56.3	43.5
Bible studies, small groups	34.5	42.5
Alpha	37.9	31.7
Door to door	23.0	24.6
Special event celebrations	25.3	19.5
Food drive, provide meals	18.3	15.1
Relationship services, counseling, etc.	16.1	13.0
Street drama/singing	11.5	14.1

The vast majority of evangelical congregations support foreign missions in some way, and advertise through the phonebook or a web-

site. Mennonite Brethren, according to their pastors, have the highest percentage of churches that have a website. They are more likely to host BBQs/block parties/carnivals, Alpha meetings and perform "acts of kindness, like free car washes, raking leaves or handing out free drinks," which are more common among metropolitan churches. They are also more likely to have "held a church worship service in an alternate location in the community, like a park or a building that is not a church," which is partly related to the tendency not to own a church building. They are less likely than Baptists and PAOC to go door-to-door or perform street drama/singing, although they are not significantly lower. Virtually all evangelical churches in the sample were involved in some sort of local outreach that involved volunteers (excluding the top three items in the Table 6) and three Mennonite Brethren churches were involved in all of them (only two other churches were involved in all nine). Other outreach events performed by Mennonite Brethren churches (all under 10% of the churches) include youth drop-ins or other youth programs (8.0%), music presentations and plays (5.7%), gardening classes (5.7%), sports programs or games (5.7%) and women's shelters (3.4%), along with a variety of other activities.

In Table 7, pastors were asked the following question regarding their congregation: "Now, I would like to find out what community service activities are sponsored by this church. By this I mean those activities run by your church where most of the people who benefit are in your local community but are not part of your church. At any time in the last year, has this church provided…?" This question was followed by, "About how many lay people in this church are involved in these activities in the past year?" The parentheses in each column indicate the median number of lay volunteers (in the average week) from the church that engage in that activity. Only 4% of churches said that they were involved in none of the following activities, and the average was 3.5 (median=3) of these ten activities per church. Mennonite Brethren churches had a slightly higher average of 3.7 (median=4).

Table 7 - Outreach - Service to the Community

% of churches that have the program	MB	Others
Cash or vouchers for needy	74.7 (4)	79.0 (3)
Visiting elderly, hospitalized	56.3 (5.5)	64.5 (5)
Counseling	55.2 (2.5)	49.9 (2)
Food pantry/soup kitchen	47.1 (10)	44.2 (8)
Community workshops	46.0 (3.5)	26.9 (4)
Prison ministry	17.2 (3)	21.7 (3)
Day care, preschool or after school programs	25.3 (5.5)	15.6 (6)
Substance abuse programs	20.7 (3)	13.8 (4)
Language training	17.2 (3)	13.3 (4)
Employment services	13.8 (3)	13.6 (2)
Volunteer for other organizations	78.2 (12)	78.3 (12)

Three-quarters of evangelical congregations offer financial help to needy families in the form of cash or vouchers. Visitation and counseling are commonly offered by churches, and surprisingly, just under half of the churches provide a food pantry or soup kitchen, with a median of eight volunteers involved each week. Mennonite Brethren are lower on visitation, partly because visitation is less common among metropolitan churches. Mennonite Brethren are more likely than any of the other denominations to offer "day care, pre-school or before/after school programs" and "community workshops on a topic of interest, like financial planning, parenting, or youth issues."

The final item in Table 7 shows that there are a significant number of attendees from evangelical congregations who volunteer with other community organizations. On average, pastors (from all five denominations) estimated that 19.3 lay persons in their church volunteer weekly for other organizations, while 22.4 volunteer weekly for their internal programs (if someone volunteered for more than one internal program, they were counted twice). Mennonite Brethren have higher averages, with 31.8 external volunteers per week compared to 26.0 internal volunteers. Mennonite Brethren are unique in having more volunteers serving their community through other organizations than through service opportunities run by their church. They are also unique in that they have more volunteers. Even when I control for church size, Mennonite Brethren have, on average, 12 more volunteers

per church than the other denominations.[14] These numbers indicate a missional focus.

The external volunteerism of Mennonite Brethren is related to their tendency to cooperate with service organizations. They are more likely to prioritize cooperation between churches (see Table 4). While Mennonite Brethren churches are less likely to cooperate with other Christian (but non-evangelical) congregations (37.9% of MB churches do), they are more likely than other denominations to cooperate with other non-Christian organizations that are not congregations (like service organizations, 57.5%). They are equally likely to cooperate with evangelical congregations (80.5%), and other Christian organizations that are not churches (65.5%).

Conclusion

In spite of their historical tendency to be a separated people, Mennonite Brethren now lead other evangelical churches in their cooperative, missional activity. They lead other denominations in providing volunteers for outside organizations that service their community. The evidence suggests that many Mennonite Brethren churches are adapting an incarnational approach to reaching their communities. This approach seems to prioritize meeting community needs and building the kingdom of God before their own denomination or churches.

Internally, Mennonite Brethren lead other denominations in activities that focus on the spiritual disciplines. Like other evangelicals, nearly all churches have Bible studies and prayer meetings. They seem to be doing the right things in terms of discipleship.

The churches themselves are larger, younger and well placed in metropolitan areas. As a significant percentage of evangelical growth is now coming from immigration, and these immigrants predominately move to metropolitan areas, it seems like Mennonite Brethren are well situated for future growth.

However, not all the news is good news. Mennonite Brethren do not seem to be doing as well as the C&MA in attracting immigrants (C&MA have a higher percentage of Asian and multiracial congregations, for example), even though the Mennonite Brethren have a higher percentage of metropolitan churches.[15] Like other evangelical denominations, only about 10% of church growth seems to be conversion growth (excluding children of church members).

The data suggest that the denominational or Anabaptist identity is weak among Mennonite Brethren churches. One wonders if this unique characteristic is being absorbed by the powerful stream of a generic evangelicalism. It appears as if the struggle for a unique Mennonite Brethren identity will continue for the foreseeable future.

Endnotes

1 For this study of evangelical congregations, I define evangelicals as those who identify with an evangelical or conservative Protestant denomination. These denominations are all affiliated with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

2 Abe Dueck, and Bruce Guenther, "Canada," in *Celebrating 150 years: The Mennonite Brethren Church around the World*, ed., Abe Dueck (Kitchener/Winnipeg: Pandora Press/Kindred Productions, 2010), 49-71.

3 Rick Hiemstra, "Canadian Evangelical Congregational Income, 2003-2008," *Church & Faith Trends* 3, no.1 (February 2010):3.

4 The study was led by Sam Reimer (Professor of Sociology, Crandall University), Michael Wilkinson (Associate Professor of Sociology, Trinity Western University), and Andrew Grenville (Senior Vice President, Angus Reid Strategies). The phone interviews were subcontracted to the polling company, Advitek. My thanks to them all. In addition, I want to thank the Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism (CRCE) for funding this study in its entirety. For more information about this study, look for ongoing reports published in *Church and Faith Trends*, available online at http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=5128.

5 For more details, see Sam Reimer and Michael Wilkinson, "A Demographic Look at Evangelical Congregations," *Church and Faith Trends* 3, no. 2 (August 2010):15-17.

6 The denominational records show that the median size of MB churches is 130 and the average is 230. However, I think these figures are low, because pastors reported higher numbers to us. Of the 71 MB churches I was able to match (churches in the CECS data with churches in the denominational data), the denomination reported an average of 206.8 with a median of 140. The MB pastors told us their average attendance was 235 with a median of 170. This roughly 20% difference between our data and the denominational data also existed for two Baptist conventions. While the pastors may have been a bit optimistic when reporting attendance numbers to us, it is likely that our figures are accurate because they are more up to date (some churches don't report every year). Of course, the denominational figures are also based on pastor (or church staff) reports. Nonetheless, since our interviews may have under-represented some of the smallest congregations, we think the correct numbers are in between our findings and the denominational numbers. Thus, the averages and means re-

ported represent our best estimate for all congregations in these five denominations.

7 For example, Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Churches* (Toronto: Novalis Publishing, 2004); K. Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World: The Canadian Experience*, new edition (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

8 According to Reginald Bibby, evangelical church growth is not due to new converts but rather due to the "circulation of the saints." See Reginald W. Bibby and M. B. Brinkerhoff, "Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People who Join Conservative Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12 (1973): 273-283; Reginald W. Bibby and M. B. Brinkerhoff, "Circulation of the Saints revisited," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22 (1983): 253-262; Reginald W. Bibby, "Circulation of the Saints 1966-1990: New Data, New Reflections," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994): 273-280. Bibby has chided evangelicals for failing at evangelism, something they emphasize so much. Yet, he has also wondered if his "circulation" thesis—where most newcomers to evangelical churches in Calgary are evangelicals from other evangelical churches—is really a sign of ineffective churches, since it indicates that evangelical churches do a good job of holding on to mobile affiliates. Reginald W. Bibby. *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1993).

9 See Darrell L. Guder *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006); Tim Keller, "The Missional Church" (June 2001) - downloadable at http://www.download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Missional_Church-Keller.pdf

10 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

11 http://www.purposedrivenchurch.com/PurposeDriven/MCMS_Templates/Legacy/Generic/AboutUsTemplate.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID={A7F460DB-392C-4ADE-9B5F-FA7F92F77E49}&NRORIGINALURL=%2fen-S%2fAboutUs%2fWhoWeAre%2fFAQ.htm&NRCACHEHINT=Guest#whatispd

12 Scott McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today*, February 2007, 1-6. Retrieved at http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html

13 Reginald W. Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1993).

14 In an OLS regression, I controlled for those variables (all that I could find) that were significant in the equation and removed all those that were not, using a step-wise technique. This regression included average attendance, % white, % poor, gender of pastor, and MB denominational affiliation. The adjusted R^2 was .374, indicating a strongly predictive model. Interestingly, women pastors have, once I control for church size, 40 more volunteers on average than male pastor churches. The fact that MBs average 12 more volunteers in this equation is significant at the .1 level, but misses the typical .05 cut off.

15 Reimer and Wilkinson, "A Demographic Look at Evangelical Congregations,"11.

Growth of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Quebec

Richard Lougheed

The province of Quebec was introduced to the Mennonite Brethren just over fifty years ago. This chapter will begin by providing a historical overview of the preparation and organization of the pioneer years and then describe the exceptional revival years of the late 1970s. The subsequent decline and renewed efforts bring the story to the present day. In order to evaluate Mennonite Brethren church progress I will occasionally provide a comparison with other evangelical denominations in Quebec.

Early Mennonite Ventures

Many Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, who immigrated to Canada and even the United States, entered North America via Quebec, landing in Quebec City and taking a train through Montreal. A few recorded their impressions, but all moved on to Ontario or other points further west.

Mennonite groups did not take a serious interest in Quebec until the 1950s. While Mennonite Brethren still seemed to be settling into their new country, Canada, other Mennonites began looking at mission to non-Mennonites. Home mission in both Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren circles initially concentrated almost exclusively on reaching out to Germanic or Russian immigrants. However, tales of persecution by Roman Catholics towards evangelical Protestants in Quebec sparked the interest of some Swiss Mennonites (sometimes called Old Mennonites). In 1957 two couples were sent by the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and the Mennonite Board of Mission to evangelize the French in Quebec. Tilman Martin and Harold Reesor, along with their families, began in Montreal, but made very slow progress in learning French and breaking through the linguistic

and religious backgrounds. By 1960 they had a few converts in two small groups, one in urban Montreal and one sixty kilometers north in Joliette.

Early Mission Explorations

In 1957 Henry Warkentin, a Mennonite Brethren pastor from British Columbia, was studying the French Protestant movement in Quebec for his Bachelor of Divinity thesis and visited Montreal to explore mission possibilities.[1] His conclusions were quite positive about the need and the potential. When he became the national chair of the Canada Inland Mission (CIM) of the Mennonite Brethren Church in July 1959, and was located in Leamington, Ontario as a pastor of Meadow Brook Fellowship, he became the obvious choice to pursue the implementation of a Quebec mission.[2] Mennonite, Plymouth Brethren and Fellowship Baptist missionaries in Quebec had already been contacted and were enthusiastic about other workers coming.

Quebec was rarely mentioned in Mennonite Brethren denominational papers during the 1950s. While news of work in English Canada (including Mennonite Central Committee [MCC] workers in Newfoundland and Labrador) and international news were more closely followed, mention of Quebec was scarce—it was perceived as being neither a foreign area nor truly domestic. Unlike the case of the Swiss Mennonites, persecution in Quebec did not seem to motivate the Mennonite Brethren to a greater sense of mission. Gradually, the Roman Catholic Church lost its political and social control, which diminished the tendency on the part of local leaders towards aggressive acts against evangelical Protestants.

In 1958 mission leader J. B. Toews offered an intriguing statement:

> (T)he second coming of Christ is dependent on world evangelization. The rapture depends on the completion of the missionary task. The true sign of an expectancy of the return of the Lord is the attitude toward the completion of our assignment. The center of missionary activity is shifting to South America. Persecution indicates the center of mission work, and this is certainly true of South America.[3]

He also emphasized the importance of going into areas of "spiritual darkness."[4] While some Quebec evangelicals experienced persecution, and French Canada was described by some as being in "spiritual darkness," the Mennonite Brethren made no link between the situation in Quebec and the mandate of CIM for quite some time.

Meanwhile, the Congolese government was pressing for more missionary teachers.[5] Mennonite groups were prominent with 100 North Americans working with the Congo Inland Mission, although Mennonite Brethren missionaries resisted a proposal to create one large Congolese national church.[6] By January 1959 the first signs of violence directed against Belgians and Catholics surfaced in the Congo; the anger soon accelerated and spread to target all missionaries. Six months later the Mennonite Brethren Mission Board was looking for other fields to settle their Congolese missionaries and those in training for the Congo.[7] By July 1960 all the missionaries had fled and one year after that the Mission Board had recruited a Congo missionary for pioneering Quebec work.[8] It took two years from the first violence in Congo until some of these missionaries were eventually relocated in Quebec.

Change in Strategy

The Congo experience was crucial for the development of Mennonite Brethren missionary work in Quebec. Some Mennonite Brethren missionaries to the Congo had already attended the Béthel Bible College in Lennoxville, Quebec for French language training. Just as Warkentin was trying to stimulate interest for Quebec, another large mission field with French-speaking missionaries was closing down. Nobody wanted to downsize mission work so all these missionaries needed a place to honor their call. The timing was almost perfect for starting work in Quebec. The only hitch was the lingering hope for several years that it might be possible to reopen mission work in Congo. In fact, Congo did eventually allow some missionaries back, but only if they provided secular education and health services.[9]

Once CIM chose Quebec as a possible field, there was an immediate need to organize and to accommodate the many Congo missionaries left unemployed. CIM had almost dissolved with decentralization to the provinces. Peter Penner writes, "Fortunately the decision of 1959 to use the more or less defunct CIM to investigate possibilities in Quebec gave it and its chairman new life."[10] A $5,700 budget

was allocated for the first year while three years later the whole CIM budget was dedicated to Quebec.[11] CIM began its work in Quebec by trying to connect former teachers in the Congo with employment by the Quebec Protestant School Boards; this resulted in many applicants, but little success.

In one way, the Congo had been much more straightforward and easier than Quebec. In the former, there was an obvious need for health and education aid and a relatively thriving French Protestant community with many requests for outside help. Quebec, however, was a thriving Roman Catholic bastion in a modern Canada, with no obvious practical needs other than the lack of an evangelical Protestant presence. So when Ernie Dyck was first approached by Henry Warkentin to become Quebec's pioneer missionary he refused. He still hoped to return to the Congo because he found the Quebec challenge too daunting.[12]

By July 1961 Dyck changed his mind and was appointed at the national Mennonite Brethren conference as the first missionary to Quebec. Almost immediately, he visited Quebec with Warkentin to explore possible locations. They again consulted Mennonites, Plymouth Brethren and Fellowship Baptist workers in Quebec. The criteria used for a mission site were threefold: (1) a sizable population base with no French evangelical church in the area; (2) proximity to other missionaries especially Mennonites; and (3) access to English language education for the Dyck children.

The early success came in small towns north of Montreal, particularly with marginalized people who were not French Catholic, that is, with a network of Portuguese people, and with other Protestants without churches. As congregations grew, they started daughter churches nearby.

Initially the congregations were linked directly to the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference through CIM.[13] When the need was expressed in 1965 for bilingual reports from Quebec at the national conference, it was not a reference to Canada's two official languages, but rather to German and English.

Revival and an Indigenous Church

The historical research of Peter Penner and Ted Regehr, along with Ernie Dyck's autobiography, provide a good informational base for understanding the pioneer period of Mennonite Brethren missions

in Quebec.[14] I will look now at the twenty-five years of church development since Penner's research in the mid-1980s.

Did Mennonite Brethren missionaries in Quebec lead converts to give up their language, culture and independence? Although those with English-language theological training dominated Mennonite Brethren work in Quebec, an early priority was placed on biblical training in French for converts. Obviously, the first missionaries were English, but they insisted on worshiping solely in French from the start. Local French candidates were sought as soon as possible and within twenty-five years (by 1984) most Mennonite Brethren leaders in Quebec were French-speaking.

In terms of indigenous or local leadership within congregations, the Mennonite Brethren had already decided to make this a priority in their Congo mission, and did so again in the early Quebec work. The first local candidate for ministry was David Franco, a young man of Portuguese origin. He attended the interdenominational Béthel Bible College for training and began as pastor in 1970. Already in 1971, after ten years of mission, the addition of a Belgian missionary (via the Congo) meant that two of the three pastors were now French-speaking. By 1989 all the pastors were born in Quebec. By 2010, as other ethnic groups are added, all pastors are ministering to their own language group.

The move to local control in the area of theological training took longer. The Institut Biblique Laval (IBL) began in 1976, had its first Québécois teacher in 1981 and decided in that year to teach in French only.[15] Its first Québécois principal, Jean-Raymond Théoret, was appointed in 1982. There have been no full-time professors who were from English Canada since Gerald Janzen left in 1986.

The English pioneers avoided starting English language congregations even in Montreal.[16] They also asked in 1968 for the French name of the Conference to be changed from Frères Mennonites to Église chrétienne, alleging that they were mistaken for Mormons or a Roman Catholic religious community. The name change suggestion was rebuffed. Eventually, a compromise resulted in the lengthy name of Église chrétienne de la Conférence des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Canada.[17] In 1968 Quebec Mennonite Brethren leaders insisted on representation on the Board of Evangelism both to inform leaders in the rest of Canada, and to stay abreast of developments. They suggested "that the brotherhood in Quebec take care of local church problems," propose a budget, aim for financial autonomy, screen new

workers directly and organize a deputation schedule.[18] Ernie Dyck, the dynamic pioneer, loved Quebec and yet remained aloof in many ways and strongly English Canadian in his perspective (for example, he believed that federalism was the only possible option for Christians). Dyck's strong pressure for more local control ironically pushed him out of the work in Quebec for a time.[19]

Revival and Decline

In the Quebec-based movie, "The Barbarian Invasions," Father Leclerc offers an observation about the Roman Catholic Church: "At a precise moment, during the year 1966 in fact, the churches emptied in a matter of months. It is a strange phenomenon that no one has ever been able to explain." The Mennonite Brethren did not try to explain what others have called the "Quiet Revolution." Instead, they actively and aggressively evangelized and experienced amazing growth with many educated youth wanting to serve. Eventually, the Mennonite Brethren churches moved beyond their original area, and began to plant churches in the Quebec City suburbs and then in the Gaspésie. For most of the 1970s and early 1980s all evangelical Protestants in Canada looked to Quebec as an example of evangelism and growth. At its peak, there were over 700 members and about 1,000 people attending Mennonite Brethren congregations in Quebec.

Significant growth came through the influence of Guy Lavoie, a drug dealer who left Quebec, became a Jesus freak and then came back to Quebec. Following the earlier Portuguese network, Guy instigated and his brother André organized, another CÉGEP student network developed with much the same enthusiasm. [20]

Then sixteen years after the collapse of the Roman Catholic Church, the revival stopped in Quebec for all evangelical Protestant denominations. All of them had experienced growth during this period, and all saw growth climax in 1982.[21] The Mennonite Brethren were left with six stable congregations plus six mission centers. Given their remarkable growth, it is not surprising that the Quebec Mennonite Brethren decided in 1982 to set a goal of multiplying from six churches to forty in ten years.[22] They had no way of knowing that this goal was being set just as the revival ended, which was followed by a steep decline in all denominations.[23]

There were still lots of workers and enthusiasm, but now finances had to be cut for several projects and few people responded when

they evangelized. After starting many church plants, one by one they were all closed. By 1985 the original goal was seen as too ambitious so leaders in Quebec decided to aim for forty churches, but extended the target date by another ten years to 2002. Two years later, in 1987, the whole project was jettisoned and a much more realistic goal was set of 2,000 members for the year 2000 (thereby tripling membership). However, by 1991 the number of churches had dropped by 20%, and membership had declined by a third. So "Project 2000" was also scrapped. Such a drop despite enthusiastic optimism led to no further attempts at church plants for over a decade. The new goal became to encourage personal faithfulness.

There has been a great turnover of experienced pastors as the status of pastors plummeted in Quebec. Burnout among pastors multiplied and only one pastor is presently serving from those who were serving in the year 2000. Others have switched denominations or have gone to independent ministries. However, following the millennium new projects came along, inspired and pushed by the national Mennonite Brethren conference: Rendez-Vous Montréal in 2003 and Horizon Quebec in 2008. These certainly brought back a vision that had been lost and engaged some younger leaders who were not crushed by the previous decline. But, as has been the long history of French Protestant work in Quebec since 1835, the results don't tend to match investments in personnel and finances.[24]

Looking back it is much easier to see that the French Protestant growth in general, and the Mennonite Brethren growth in particular, was due far less to personalities, finances and even strategies than has previously been thought. Growth came primarily from two factors that were unplanned and unpredicted: the 1970s revival among native white French Quebecers; and since 1985, the immigration to Montreal of Haitian, African, Hispanic and other evangelical Protestants. Both can be seen as two extraordinary gifts of God's grace for growing his church in Quebec.[25] The denominations that have remained stable, or even had slight increases since 1960, have been those that planted churches during the revival and have integrated ethnic churches since that time. This is also true for the Mennonite Brethren. The Mennonite Brethren Church, which grew so quickly in Quebec among young Québécois at one time, is now growing more among English-speaking people and immigrant groups.[26]

It is a difficult time for the older French-speaking congregations. St. Jerome, the pioneer French Mennonite Brethren congregation,

now has no building of its own, a half-time pastor and perhaps fifty people attending. The congregation is facing two crucial questions: first, is there any point in straining to keep an evangelical Protestant, let alone a Mennonite Brethren, congregation in Quebec; and second, if so, how ought one to reach youth?

However, among the ongoing positive after-effects of the revival there now exists a Quebec provincial association, a French theological college (IBL became École de théologie évangélique de Montréal), a strong Mennonite Central Committee office, a camp, a French magazine (Le Lien) and a church-planting organization. Anabaptist emphases have also increased recently with a renewed focus in ÉTEM courses, the formation of the Centre anabaptiste de Montréal and greater Mennonite Brethren involvement in MCC.

Clearly, Quebec has a different culture than the rest of North America.[27] Other Mennonite Brethren and Mennonites have found that national identity requires national structures with independence.[28] Quebec Mennonite Brethren remain as a very small and weak element within a much larger, more prosperous church in the rest of Canada. My historical assessment of many denominations in the last twenty years concludes that the existence of so many denominations in Quebec has been a negative growth factor, spiritually impoverishing Quebec as well as creating competition and the division of precious resources.[29] A united evangelical Protestant church with a Québécois name and identity supported by many denominations from outside the province would likely have much greater potential.

At the present time when a French-speaking Québécois person responds to the gospel invitation, they have to learn about the New Testament story of Jesus and the apostles, which most have not heard much about. Then they need to understand the Old Testament context of Jews and Israel, temple, prophets and kingdom. Then they need to learn about the specifics of Protestantism including evangelicalism, which is quite different from the Roman Catholicism with which they had some acquaintance. Finally, they are informed about a Mennonite division in Russia in the 1860s. Most tune out long before the account ends.

All this history is an impediment to accepting and growing an understanding of the gospel among people who lack basic Bible knowledge and historical knowledge of contexts outside Quebec. Denominational distinctives, in particular the Anabaptist elements, can enrich the fabric of evangelical Protestantism. However, in a region where the

distinctions among Protestants are foreign, the preservation of historical distinctives conveys to newcomers the idea that Christians separate into small sects, each insisting on their own name and peculiarities.

The Quebec Mennonite Brethren are, however, pioneering in this matter by building a closer relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, through sharing a building and collaborating in theological education. In addition, they are cooperating with a new group in evangelism. Le Lien is also seeking to be a journal that serves other evangelical Protestant denominations in Quebec. With so many small evangelical Protestant branches in Quebec, each with their own financial woes and limited resources, increased collaboration could be the wave of the future.

Comparison

Mennonite Brethren have moved from being quite fundamentalist (associating primarily with Plymouth Brethren and Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists) to being the most progressive of evangelicals, that is, the only ones working as part of a Quebec university. They are probably the best-educated evangelical Protestant denomination and possibly the most nationalist.[30] They have great potential for influence with a high proportion of members who are professionals. The Mennonite Brethren have, from the start of the revival, sought to interact with the cultural elite, and the changing forces that are driving such an enormous disconnect between the evangelical Protestant church and society regarding traditional theological terms and morality. However, most members are babyboomers. They are near a crossroads as the early converts age and the new generation of converts are fewer. In addition, the Mennonite Brethren name continues to be a problem.

Related to Quebec, Roland Allen's insistence on an indigenous church has often been discussed and underlined by mission staff. Good progress can be seen in that the Mennonite Brethren were one of the first groups to develop completely French leadership, evangelists and teachers. However, the results of financing have been mixed: financially independent congregations have been achieved. But the costs of financing a French college, and various evangelism projects, cannot be covered locally in the foreseeable future. Because these key areas are financed at great expense by the national conference, they have strings attached. This has minimized the influence of the provincial structure as people outside of Quebec brought funding, which strongly

influenced priorities, time and resources. Even when unintended there are strings attached. Self-governing and self-financing are linked.[31] Creative approaches have been used in attempts to transfer the financing of the college to Quebec churches, but since 1982 Quebec remains a small mission in a low-growth area for non-immigrants. The trend among some evangelical Protestant denominations is now towards having more Haitian and African members in Quebec than those born in Quebec. Across Canada, in many denominations, there are more Hispanic or Chinese or Korean members than French. Definitely, this is not a problem peculiar to the Mennonite Brethren.

Pan Canadian or pan-North American evangelistic solutions sometimes work, but Quebec's particular cultural evolution means that often they do not fit the culture or the timing in Quebec. Twelve years ago, church-planters (not MB particularly) suggested that Montreal needed 1,346 new congregations to meet their norms.[32] Quebec has never and will likely never match continental norms for evangelical Protestants.

The Mennonite Brethren have invested considerable money and many workers (both full-time and in short-term stints) as well as constantly promoted evangelistic mission, renewed their strategies and promoted theological training in and for Quebec. The legacy is uncertain and Quebec leaders are not all agreed. Are Mennonite Brethren in Quebec in a lull that requires more resources and perseverance, or are they facing a wall that requires some radical rethinking?

White French-speaking Quebec leads the secular moral and philosophical trends in North America. What is happening in Montreal is coming to all the rest of North America. It is imperative for the gospel in all of North America to study and communicate with a post-modern generation. While immigrant churches are more easily planted, for the moment it is reaching the white Quebecer that requires major insight since they are still driving the cultural trends that eventually influence immigrant mentalities. Quebec is a laboratory in which to invest, to pray for and to experiment with, in order to find a new solution that fits locally. To change the focus, Mennonite Brethren will need to discern God's new way that might, if the earlier revival during the 1970s to 1990s was any indication, take place in some humanly improbable way.

Endnotes

1 Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 103.

2 *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), s.v. "Meadow Brook Fellowship (Leamington, Ontario, Canada)," http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/L4274ME.html (accessed May 28, 2011); see also Nick J. Dyck and James R. Nikkel's article which is helpful in understanding trends among Mennonite Brethren who influenced Quebec work ("Church planting British Columbia," GAMEO, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/board_of_church_extension_british_columbia_conference_of_mennonite_brethren_churches (accessed May 28, 2011).

3 *Mennonite Observer*, February 28, 1958, 1, 4. See Abraham Friesen, "John B. Toews: The Last of the 'Russian' MBs", in *Leaders Who Shaped Us*, ed. Harold Jantz (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 171-187.

4 *Mennonite Observer*, March 21, 1958, 1.

5 J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire* (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1978), 106.

6 *Mennonite Observer*, May 9, 1958, 8; and Kikweta Mawa Wabala, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre" (M.Th. thesis, Faculté de Théologie Protestante de Montpelier, 1977), 151. The same resistance to ecumenical work was later present among Mennonite Brethren in Quebec.

7 *Mennonite Observer*, August 21, 1959.

8 *Mennonite Observer*, July 20, 1960, 1.

9 A list outlining the geographic expansion of Mennonite Brethren missions from North America shows that no new overseas mission fields created between 1956 (Panama) and 1968 (Uruguay). See James Pankratz, "From Foreign Mission to Global Partnership," in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 75.

10 Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length,* 42.

11 John Klassen (Virgil), letter to treasurer Gerhard Sukkau, October 8, 1961 (Reports and Correspondence 1962, B260.2 Minutes, Box 138, Mennonite Brethren Board of Evangelism, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg, MB; and Gerhard Sukkau letter, October 5, 1964 (Reports and Correspondence 1963-1968, B260.2 Minutes, Box 138, Mennonite Brethren Board of Evangelism, CMBS).

12 He is reported to have said in his student days, "Thank the Lord, that He has called us to Africa and not to Quebec" (Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length,* 104).

13 *Yearbook of the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (1964), 47.

14 T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 345-351; and Ernest Dyck, *Called to Witness* (St. Catherines, by the author, 2003).

15 Jean-Raymond Théoret and Éric Wingender, "École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal (Montréal, Québec, Canada)," in GAMEO, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/I57.html (accessed May 31, 2011); and Susan Huebert, "A Quebec Story: New Beginnings for the Mennonite Brethren,"

Mennonite Historian 33, no. 2 (June 2007): 6. At the same time, the Quebec government began to insist that businesses function in French in Quebec.

16 Ernie Dyck, in "Minutes of Board of Evangelism reps meeting with Mission workers in Quebec," April 1 1968 (B260.2 Miscellaneous or QC Files, Box 138, Mennonite Brethren Board of Evangelism, CMBS).

17 December 29, 1967, Board of Evangelism Minutes (B260.2 Miscellaneous or QC Files, Box 138, MB Board of Evangelism, CMBS). The compromise included an agreement to omit the official name on public church signs.

18 Minutes of Quebec workers meeting, January 13, 1969 in Montreal (B260.2 Miscellaneous or QC Files, Box 138, MB Board of Evangelism, CMBS).

19 Dyck describes his personal differences (*Called to Witness*, 210), while Penner analyzes the tensions, both of temperament and vision (*No Longer at Arms* Length, 110-111).

20 See the network emphasis in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 1997), 56.

21 Richard Lougheed, Wesley Peach, and Glenn Smith, *Histoire du protestantisme au Québec depuis 1960* (Quebec: La Clairière, 1999), chapter 4. A condensed English article is forthcoming.

22 The figure was determined by using a projection of growth based upon the previous ten years.

23 Lougheed, Peach, and Smith, *Histoire du protestantisme au Québec depuis 1960*, chapter 4.

24 See Jason Zuidema, ed., *The History of French-Speaking Protestantism in Quebec* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

25 This clashes with traditional evangelical explanations of revivals that either affirm that these could be planned (Charles Finney), or that they follow a recognizable pattern of greater prayer, repentance and then numbers. See Earl Cairns, *An Endless Line of Splendour* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 1986), and "Spiritual Awakenings in North America," *Christian History* 23 (1989), http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1989/issue23. My contention is that these were neither planned nor followed any recognizable pattern. They nevertheless required tremendous human effort to accompany structure and meet the many needs.

26 In 2010, there were only six Québécois congregations (the same as in 1980) plus two immigrant and two English-language congregations.

27 Wesley Peach, "Evangelism, distinctly Quebec," in *Reclaiming a Nation*, ed. Arnold Motz (Richmond: Church Leadership Library, 1990), 152-176. See also Glenn Smith's article in Zuidema, *The History of French-Speaking Protestantism in Quebec.*

28 Rodney Sawatsky, "Canadian Mennonite Nationalism?" in *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism*, ed. Abe Dueck (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), chapter 4.

29 For example, there are eight separate French theological colleges in Montreal (the number is actually increasing) each with its own library, dean, building and students. There is no common evangelical newspaper or other means of communication. There is no French equivalent of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Separate administrations exist for each denomination in an area with below 1% evangelical Protestant believers.

30 James Reimer offers an example in "Theology and Nationalism," in *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism*, ed. Abe Dueck (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), 15.
31 Jonathan Bonk's analysis of the consequences of Western missionary affluence could be applied in large measure to Quebec. See Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), chapter 2.
32 Quoted in Glenn Smith, "The Quebec Protestant Church," in *Transforming Our Nation*, ed. Murray Moerman (Delta: Church Leadership Library, 1998), 253.

A Faith I Can Call My Own: Emerging Adulthood and its Implications for Discipleship

Gil Dueck

Introduction

Sometime in the first century an early Christian expressed a sentiment that has likely been felt across religious and social groups through the ages. "We have much to say about this," writes the author, "but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" (Heb. 5:11-12). A sense of acute frustration lies behind this juxtaposition of infancy and adulthood. Perhaps many adults can think of the various ways in which they have longed for younger members of their particular communities to "grow up." But when it comes to articulating exactly what "growing up" looks like—what specific changes it entails and when it has finally occurred—there is the realization that these criteria are often based upon intuition rather than obvious and agreed upon markers.

Of course, there are no biologically necessary checkpoints on the way from childhood to adulthood and any terminology that is employed in order to narrate the journey must retain a certain fluidity. Notre Dame sociologist, Christian Smith, observes, "Life stages are not naturally given as immutable phases of existence. Rather they are cultural constructions that interact with biology and material production, and are profoundly shaped by the social and institutional conditions that generate and sustain them."[1] But while periodizations of human development are undeniably human products, they also, according to Peter Berger's famous thesis, "continuously [act] back upon their producers," and this complex interaction will be assumed throughout the analysis that follows.[2]

I intend to provide a broad overview of what many sociologists and cultural observers are describing as a new stage in human development called "emerging adulthood." This term was coined by American developmental psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett as a descriptor of individuals, aged 18-30, who are living primarily in Western countries.[3] Of central importance for the theory of emerging adulthood is the way in which adulthood is being extended or even intentionally delayed as young people spend as much as a decade pursuing not only education and work opportunities, but an increasingly elusive sense of personal identity and purpose. As a much-discussed *New York Times* article recently diagnosed it: "Kids [today] don't shuffle along in unison on the road to maturity. They slouch toward adulthood at an uneven, highly individual pace."[4]

As I will demonstrate, there are unique challenges and opportunities for those interested in encouraging and cultivating religious convictions among emerging adults. I want to interact with the theory of emerging adulthood with a view towards questions of discipleship and will conclude by asking some questions about how it might illuminate important challenges for the North American Mennonite Brethren (MB) church.

Emerging Adulthood: What Is It?

Arnett coined the term "emerging adulthood" in 2000 as he attempted to articulate the "quiet revolution" that he sensed was taking place in how people "come of age" in contemporary Western cultures.[5] As Arnett examined the twists and turns he had observed among those making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, he concluded that he was witnessing the birth of a new stage in human development. In his work among college students, Arnett found the accepted developmental stages inadequate to describe what he was seeing. He repeatedly encountered students who would chafe at the suggestion that they were "late adolescents," but would readily admit that they did not yet feel like "adults." In addition to students' self-perception, Arnett came to realize that there were key differences in their actual experiences that set them apart from the adolescent stage. Most emerging adults were no longer living with one or both of their parents, they were no longer experiencing the tumultuous changes of puberty and were no longer sharing the common experience of secondary school. In addition, emerging adults had all of the legal rights and responsibi-

lities that come with adulthood even as they felt that this category did not fit them.[6] These factors persuaded Arnett that emerging adulthood constituted a new stage in human development.[7]

Of course, a period of instability on the path to adulthood is nothing new. Arnett described a nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon, especially prominent among German elites, that anticipated what has today become the norm among the middle classes in most Western cultures. There was a period called the *Wanderschaft* (roughly translated "traveling period"), which referred to the expectation that during his late teens and early twenties, a young man would devote himself to international travel and self-discovery before settling into the adult commitments.[8] So there is clear precedent for the idea of a period of carefree freedom from responsibility prior to "settling down," but this was normally set in the context of an assumed desire for the respect, responsibility and authority that came with the "arrival" of adulthood.

Yet, today, there seems to be a pronounced ambivalence among young people regarding whether adulthood is even a desired destination. Arnett provides a homely example by citing a 2003 internet article entitled "Ten Things to Do Before You Turn 30," which included the following suggestions:

> • See the world. It's much easier to do when you're 22 and footloose than 35 with two bawling babies in your backpack.
> • Take risks with your job. Aim for the career you've dreamed of doing. Or just have fun for now. Later, when you've got the mortgage and the 2.3 kids and a time share in Cocoa Beach, fun will be the last thing on your mind.
> • Use this decade to go to extremes. Climb the tallest mountain you can find. Learn to sail. Road trip to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. [By age 30] people will really be expecting you to act like a grown up. So, you will need some experiences to teach you how to get there.[9]

One can't help but notice the historically novel assessment of adulthood that lies behind this kind of "advice." What seems most striking is the way in which "adulthood" is clearly perceived on the horizon even as it is, at some level, resisted. Christian Smith summarizes, "Most [emerging adults] understand themselves to be in a phase of life that is

free, fluid, tentative, experimental, and relatively unbound. They want to enjoy it while it lasts...They want to acquire independence and the ability to stand on their own two feet. But most of them also do not want full adulthood to come too quickly."[10]

The Cultural Context of Emerging Adulthood

Of course, no social phenomenon occurs in a vacuum and emerging adulthood is no exception. It has clearly been conditioned and continues to be enabled by certain unique features of Western culture. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss only two of these features.

The Growth of Higher Education

One of the most critical enabling factors is the rising levels of education that have accompanied the ongoing Western transition to post-industrial economies. Arnett cites studies that indicate an astonishing nine out of ten Americans graduating from high school expect to attend college and almost two thirds of them actually enrol in some form of post-secondary education in the year immediately following graduation.[11] By age 25, almost 70% of Americans have obtained some level of college education.[12] Again, the reasons for the "normalization" of post-secondary education are numerous but most observers point to an increasingly competitive job market combined with general increases in the cost of living in most Western countries.

While the normalization of the college experience is undoubtedly linked to the demands of increasingly specialized and unpredictable economies, there is also a sense in which the college experience has become a rite of passage. In college, emerging adults not only prepare for a career but engage a period of exploration and discovery in nearly every area of life, from personal identity and relationships, to education and work options, to religious beliefs and worldviews. The glue that holds this experience together is the theme of *identity formation in the context of increasing personal autonomy,* and the college experience has become one of the critical arenas in which this takes place. Arnett summarizes,

> In many ways, the American college experience is the emerging adult environment *par excellence.* It is expressly designed for the independent explorations that are at the

> heart of emerging adulthood...College is a social island set off from the rest of society, a temporary safe haven where emerging adults can explore possibilities in love, work, and world views with many of the responsibilities of adult life minimized, postponed, kept at bay.[13]

But while there is an obvious expectation of higher education among young North Americans, the link between that education and specific career prospects is far from clear. Interestingly, as Arnett asked students to reflect *back* on their college experiences they pointed toward their own self-discovery and growth, not the specific job skills that they were given, as being of greatest significance.[14] Post-secondary education has become an exploratory stage of development that gives emerging adults the freedom to define themselves even as it delays their eventual entrance into the workforce.

The Delaying of Marriage

Another critical social trend behind the phenomenon of emerging adulthood is the fact that young adults are waiting significantly longer to marry.[15] The reasons for this trend include factors such as the sexual revolution, the widespread availability of birth control and the massive influx of women into the workforce. There is also a clear link between the level of education and the timing of marriage: the more education, the later and less likely people will marry.[16]

By way of contrast, Arnett cites a 1991 study in which sociologists analysed adolescent development in 186 traditional/preindustrial cultures and found that the typical age of marriage was 18 for women and 20 for men.[17] Arnett observes that "in such cultures, the timing of marriage (and therefore of the transition to adulthood it confers) is often chosen not by young people themselves but by their families, according to family interests and cultural expectations of the appropriate age of marriage."[18]

The contrast with contemporary attitudes toward marriage among emerging adults is striking. Rather than seeing marriage as a rite of passage with meanings ascribed by the family or wider community, emerging adults tend to assess their readiness to tie the knot based on almost purely subjective criteria. Arnett summarizes a few of these criteria,

> They want to get their own lives in order, as individuals, before they commit their lives and fates to another person. Some of this project is practical—finishing education, establishing financial stability, settling into a stable career. Other aspects of it are more intangible and internal. To judge their readiness, emerging adults look within themselves and ask themselves if they feel ready, if they feel mature enough, if they feel they know themselves well enough.[19]

Marriage statistics confirm the effect that these attitudes are having. Canadian sociologist Vappu Tysskä compared marriage statistics from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States and observed an undeniable trend toward a longer trip to the altar. She cites the 2003 Canadian census according to which Canadian men married for the first time at 30.6 years of age and Canadian woman first tied the knot at 28.5 years.[20] In the United Kingdom, the corresponding numbers were 31.7 for men and 29.5 for women. The United States remains somewhat of an anomaly in that people tend to get married younger (26.7 for men and 25.1 for women), yet even these numbers represent a delay compared to previous generations.[21] The significance of this cultural delaying of marriage is difficult to overstate, particularly since it affects when people become parents and settle into more traditional roles within their communities.

Key Features of Emerging Adulthood

With this context in mind, I am prepared to describe the particulars of emerging adulthood in more detail. I have established that people are taking as much as an extra decade to reach adulthood. What are they doing during this time?

The Priority of Identity Formation

Most people in their twenties have left home and become at least somewhat independent from their parents.[22] Yet while they experience a measure of freedom for self-determination, they have not yet embraced all of the roles and responsibilities associated with adulthood. According to Arnett, the defining feature of this "limbo stage" is the emphasis on self-discovery and identity formation. Arnett notes that

he is departing from earlier theories, notably those of the famed developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, which saw identity formation primarily as a function of adolescence.[23] Arnett suggests that while most research into identity formation has focused on adolescents, "this research has shown that identity achievement has rarely been reached by the end of high school and that identity development continues through the late teens and the twenties."[24] He contrasts the "tentative and transient" identity explorations of adolescents with the more "serious and identity focused" explorations of emerging adulthood. Each change of college major, each new job or relationship, each new experience is part of a search for that elusive "fit" that will move an individual toward a more stable understanding of personal identity and vocation.

The Orientation Toward the Self

Arnett states quite baldly that there is no time of life that is more self-focused than emerging adulthood. Adolescents, while experiencing a growing level of independence, are still beholden to their parents for a fair degree of structure in their lives. By the age of 30, most people have established a home of their own with a new set of commitments and obligations. But between the ages of 18-30 there has opened up a remarkable period of freedom where emerging adults learn to make decisions, both large and small, for themselves. In Arnett's view this is a good thing. "There is nothing wrong about being self-focused during emerging adulthood: it is normal, healthy and temporary. By focusing on themselves, emerging adults develop skills for daily living, gain a better understanding of who they are and what they want from life, and begin to build a foundation for their adult lives."[25]

But while Arnett sees this as a healthy trend, not all would agree. Jean Twenge, a 37 year-old associate professor of psychology at San Diego State University, herself on the upper edge of the emerging adulthood demographic, questions Arnett's assessment of the health of this "self-focus" and clearly disagrees with the suggestion that it is temporary. She has dubbed the generation born in the 1970s to the early 1990s, "Generation Me" (GenMe), and described it as the first generation that was born into world that took the self-importance of the individual for granted. Twenge describes what has produced GenMe,

> Reliable birth-control, legalized abortion, and a cultural shift toward parenthood as a choice made us the most *wanted* generation of children in American history. Television, movies, and school programs have told us we were special from toddlerhood to high school, and we believe it with a self-confidence that approaches boredom: why talk about it? It's just the way things are...We take it for granted that we're independent, special individuals, so we don't really need to think about it.[26]

This level of "self-confidence approaching boredom" sounds very different from Arnett's notion of pragmatic, calculating (and temporary) self-focus.[27] Whatever the assessment of the *health* of this self-focus, its existence cannot be denied. It could be suggested, however, that the very phenomenon of emerging adulthood is evidence that the "self-focus" of adolescence is now extending much further than in years past and may therefore be a more enduring facet of the psychological makeup of emerging adults than Arnett is willing to admit.

The Feeling of Being "In-Between"

In terms of the lived experience of emerging adults, the overwhelming psychological state is that of feeling "in-between" where they experience some aspects of what they understand to be adulthood but do not yet feel as if they've arrived. According to Arnett's research, over 60% of those aged 18-25 reported some kind of "yes and no" response to the question of whether or not they were adults. This number decreased significantly as people in their late twenties and early thirties were polled, but even here a full 30% still reported feeling "in-between."[28] This speaks to the gradual and intuitive process that many experience the transition to adulthood as being. No longer is adulthood marked by certain events or milestones, instead its definition seems to have become increasingly slippery as individuals subjectively interpret when they have arrived at the appropriate level of independence and stability. Arnett summarizes, "for most people, the feeling of being fully adult takes a long time to attain, and for a substantial period they feel in-between, as if they are emerging into adulthood but not there yet."[29]

The Age of Possibilities and Anxiety

For all the identity confusion that comes with the long journey from adolescence to adulthood, this is still, for many, a time of optimism as a world of possibilities stretches out before them. There is some debate regarding whether late adolescence and emerging adulthood should be seen primarily as a time of angst and anxiety or whether it should be seen as a time of optimism and calculated self-definition.[30] Twenge is among the more pessimistic, arguing that one of the downsides of this relentless orientation toward the self is that disappointments loom large because there is "nothing [beyond the self] to focus on."[31] According to Twenge, this sets up emerging adults for a high risk of depression, as loneliness, disappointment and anxiety inevitably set in when the self cannot bear these hopes and burdens.

Arnett chides Twenge for confusing an increase in lifetime rates of depression with the specific psychological states of emerging adults. While life for many Americans does feel more stressful, Arnett emphasizes that there is no link between this reality and the specific expectations and attitudes of emerging adults.[32] He goes on to cite Canadian research that suggests that depression actually decreases in early adulthood and that a sense of well-being reaches a peak around the age of 25-26.[33] Arnett paradoxically suggests that while emerging adults are generally quite cynical and pessimistic about the world around them, they are often quite optimistic about their own capacity to construct their individual lives in ways that conform to their hopes and desires. Arnett calls this phenomenon "high hopes in a grim world," and points to the inability of emerging adults to distinguish between private and public hopes as the key factor that has produced the myth that they are generally unhappy.[34] Whether this dualistic approach is sustainable over the long term remains to be seen, but for many emerging adults the tension is at least temporarily manageable.

Implications for Discipleship

The central thrust of this paper is my argument that the theory of emerging adulthood represents an important conceptual tool for understanding the experience of transitioning to adulthood. While most of the research in this field is attempting to articulate a broad theory of human development, there are obviously significant implications for those interested in nurturing Christian convictions among emerging

adults. So it will become significant to understand the religious beliefs of emerging adults and note which issues rise to the surface. I will offer a brief introduction to some of these issues.

A Congregation of One

In a world where so many hopes and expectations have been downloaded to the level of individual identity construction, it stands to reason that emerging adults approach questions of faith in a highly individualized way. This conclusion is clearly supported by Arnett's research. In a 2002 study Arnett and Jensen found that while only 27% of respondents stated that attending religious services was either "quite important" or "very important," a striking 52% said that their religious beliefs were either "quite important" or "very important" to them.[35] The authors attribute this distinction between the importance of religious services and religious belief to the high value that emerging adults place on "thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and on forming a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma."[36]

It seems clear that the formation of religious beliefs, like every other role or identity question faced by emerging adults, must be done "on one's own." Janie, one of Arnett's interviewees in a 2001 study, could speak for many when she says, "I don't really have any really strong beliefs because I believe that whatever you feel, it's personal… Everybody has their own idea of God and what God is, and because you go to a church doesn't define it any better because you still have your personal beliefs of how you feel about it and what's right for you personally."[37] Views like these are obviously not encouraging for churches since it seems as if religious beliefs can exist quite happily outside of the context of commitment to a local faith community. As Arnett observes, "emerging adults tend to personalize their relationship with God in a way that makes participating in organized religion unnecessary or even an impediment to the expression of their beliefs."[38]

The Disconnect From Childhood Religion

When it comes to the relationship between childhood faith and the faith (or lack of faith) in emerging adulthood, the trends are disputed. Arnett concluded, somewhat surprisingly, that there was a

marked *lack* of connection between the religious beliefs of emerging adults and the religious beliefs they were taught as children.[39] Christian Smith is a little more optimistic, arguing that emerging adults tend to retain many of the religious beliefs of their upbringing, even as those beliefs tend to be held more lightly and modified for a more "individualized fit."[40] What all would agree on is that emerging adults are disengaging from actual participation in religious gatherings, or at least approaching these activities with more therapeutic motivations.[41]

However, to note a weakening connection to childhood religion is not to suggest that emerging adults are "switching religions"; indeed the most dominant trend is simply to disengage from religious participation altogether. According to Christian Smith, "Emerging adults are, on most sociological measures, clearly the least religious adults in the Unites States today."[42] The potential reasons for this disengagement are numerous, but one likely option is that religious participation is one of the first independent choices that emerging adults have the opportunity to make as they begin to differentiate from their parents.

Religious participation is a choice that "costs" emerging adults comparatively little since they have been told that religion is a personal matter to be decided upon based on therapeutic criteria. So religious *beliefs* can be retained even as religious *participation* is rejected. As Christian Smith remarks, "Typically, emerging adults do not seek identity differentiation by rejecting their parents' religious beliefs... outright. Usually emerging adults retain many of their religious beliefs—even if they are compartmentalized or moved further into the background than they were in earlier years."[43] Therefore, this data may not represent an overtly negative statement about any particular religion but could reflect a generally negative orientation toward conventional social roles with which many emerging adults associate religious participation.[44]

Belief... For Oneself

Finally, one of the most dominant trends is in the area of discovering or clarifying religious beliefs *for oneself.* Emerging adulthood appears to be one more manifestation of the "inwardness" of moral sources within modern culture. As the esteemed philosopher and historian Charles Taylor notes, "Modern culture has developed conceptions of individualism which picture the human person as, at least potentially, finding his or her own bearings within, declaring independence from

the webs of interlocution which have originally formed him/her, or at least neutralizing them."[45] Therefore, the uniquely "modern" approach to identity formation contains this imperative to separate or differentiate oneself from dominant social and cultural influences. As one of those influences, the church will have to reconsider the question of how emerging adults can go through a process of gaining *ownership* of their convictions.

This could be nothing more than the final flowering of what Peter Berger called "the heretical imperative," that is, the suggestion that modern culture forces each of us to become "heretics" (from the Greek *haeresis*, or "choosing for oneself") without the option of falling back on a wider communal consensus or tradition.[46] Berger's unique contribution is his recognition that people do not choose the path of "heresy"; it is chosen for them by virtue of the time and place in which they live. Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow summarizes the commonsense expression of the heretical imperative, saying, "Religious beliefs nowadays...are negotiable. Nobody is burned at the stake for denying some creedal proposition. Everybody has the authority to make up their own minds. That is how we understand belief—something that is personal, idiosyncratic, and always somewhat tentative."[47] This understanding will not appeal to all, but it is hard to deny that it reflects a broad cultural consensus on the nature and function of religious belief. The church can wish that it were not so but these assumptions are simply part of the cultural air that emerging adults have breathed.

The critical questions, then, have to do with how authentic Christian conviction can be nurtured in *this* kind of a context, a context where the assumption is that belief can only be negotiated at the level of individual persuasion and only (perhaps initially) as part of a broader quest to construct and maintain the fragile edifice of personal identity.

A Mennonite Brethren Connection

In the final section of this paper, I want briefly to connect some of the key insights from the theory of emerging adulthood with one of the central plotlines of the Mennonite Brethren story. I hope to begin a conversation on how Mennonite Brethren might benefit from an examination of their own convictions, history and practices through the lens of emerging adulthood. To anticipate my conclusion, I see an important connection between the imperative of owning convictions

among emerging adults and the historical Mennonite Brethren emphasis on experiential faith.

In 1975 the influential Mennonite Brethren teacher and conference leader, John A. Toews, published *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. Toward the end of the book, Toews identifes seven "characteristic distinctives of MB theology." Among several characteristically Anabaptist distinctives such as "practical biblicism" and "discipleship," is another notable entry: something Toews calls "experiential faith."[48] This is a term he uses to describe the restless Mennonite Brethren piety that refuses to accept the "memorized faith" of the wider community, but is always in search of personal contact with God.[49] This, according to Toews, is a critical part of what makes up Mennonite Brethren identity. One simply cannot recite the lines from another's script or sing another's song—each must speak and sing for themselves.[50]

Something is at the root of the Mennonite Brethren story that sees a firsthand experience of God as essential. But when it comes to *articulating* this experience of God there has been a significant lack of precision, owing, no doubt, to the inherent dangers of preescribing norms in such a subjective realm. The most consistent term that has been used would likely be the so-called "crisis conversion," a term with widespread currency within a number of pietistic renewal movements and their denominational offspring. J. B. Toews, in his book *Pilgrimage of Faith*, describes this common experience within the first decades of Mennonite Brethren history.

> A deep sin consciousness and a stark sense of "lostness" characterized many of the recorded conversion stories of the early Mennonite Brethren. This remained the normative experience for Mennonite Brethren into the 1950s. They generally spoke of days, weeks, and often months of searching for peace in a spirit of repentance over sin. When the answer of forgiveness came to them through the Scriptures there was great rejoicing. Regeneration of a heart of sin took place through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. A person receiving assurance of forgiven sins was now ready, in thankfulness and love, to offer soul and body as a living sacrifice to God.[51]

But a careful reading of Mennonite Brethren history will reveal that as the "song" sung by the early Mennonite Brethren was repeated

over succeeding generations, people started raising concerns about how easy it was to mouth the "words." The "form" of the crisis conversion had been preserved, but as the third and fourth generation of Mennonite Brethren came along, the vitality of that experience seemed more and more difficult to replicate. John A. Toews notes this in a brief aside in his history of the Mennonite Brethren. He admits that questions arise when adult renewal experiences are seen as the norm by the children of the next generation. "As the conversion experience is duplicated at younger and still younger ages, a subtle change takes place in the meaning of the concept. Conversion for a six-year old obviously does not have the same meaning as for the man of thirty-six."[52]

Toews was not alone in noticing the problems that came along with this whole idea of "experiential faith." Earlier in 1966, Delbert Wiens, a young Mennonite Brethren philosopher/historian, published a provocative article called "New Wineskins for Old Wine," where he called into question many of the "forms" of his Mennonite Brethren predecessors, one of which was the very crisis conversion that had come to encapsulate the Mennonite Brethren notion of experiential faith. "The children are not satisfied," Wiens argued, "with the forms we have provided. They have all too often gone through the form-conversion and the ritual baptism. But then comes emptiness...The children's problem is to continue a process whose beginnings they cannot remember, for it preceded their birth in the resolve of their parents."[53] Years later, as Wiens reflected back on his own introduction to the Christian faith as a child, he explained his own experience of this "emptiness,"

> Many of us can still remember that how we lived was more the test of our faithfulness than what we professed. Indeed, that test tormented me and my friends when the adults in our small church grilled us whether our conversions had been real. The results of the adult spiritual crisis which had been experienced by some of them were now demanded of us nine and ten year olds. How had we changed? What sort of rebellious behaviors had been purged? Some of us had only peccadillos to confess, but at least we knew that they were sins and we could say that we felt forgiven.[54]

It seems that these concerns represent a developing reaction against what could be called a "memorized faith" within the Menno-

nite Brethren church. The fresh experience of renewal that had animated the first few generations of Mennonite Brethren had become, for some at least, a source of confusion and frustration as they struggled to make their own experience fit within the received (and implicitly normative) forms. Toews concludes, "To preserve the integrity of the Mennonite Brethren Confession as well as the validity of the conversion experience, a new and more comprehensive definition of the experience is needed."[55] Indeed, Toews cites with approval the very questions that Wiens raised as he called for a "new and more comprehensive" definition of the experiential faith that would define the Mennonite Brethren church in the years ahead.[56]

If Toews was right—if what is needed is a new and more comprehensive definition of the *experience* that animates the *experiential faith* that is such a critical aspect of Mennonite Brethren identity—then perhaps a consideration of the challenges of discipleship and identity formation among emerging adults can be a window into a wider conversation on central Mennonite Brethren convictions regarding "experience" itself. Could, for example, Mennonite Brethren begin to see experiential faith cast in language that includes, but is not limited by, the progression from despair and guilt to assurance and release? Is there also room for a wider and more comprehensive understanding of "experience" that could include a gradual process of ownership or appropriation of convictions? Is there room within the notion of "experience" that includes a *wrestling with* the traditions that Mennonite Brethren have received as they seek to articulate them, and indeed incarnate them, in ever-changing contexts? It is this notion of "experience" that is aptly and eloquently summarized by Delbert Wiens,

> We will only grow beyond our forefathers by rediscovering the reality of the experience that came to them. Like them we need to meet God. Like them we need to be open about our experiences and our feelings, being willing once again to sit around tables, struggling in all honesty to study the Scriptures in light of our experiences and those of many other sorts of Christians into whose experiences we must be willing to enter... We must be willing to bring our hard questions, our unsolved problems, to the Scriptures and to each other, trusting that the Holy Spirit will lead us into new and deeper experience with Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Then we will

> grow from glory to glory—and from form to form—until, beyond the need for present forms, we meet the one to whom they ever point.[57]

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to broadly outline the theory of emerging adulthood as an identifiably new stage of human development and to point toward some of the questions that may need to be asked if the church is to take the implications of this reality for discipleship seriously. I have tried to focus some of those questions within the context of the North American Mennonite Brethren church as it continues to appropriate a tradition of renewal and hold out the possibility of an authentic encounter with God.

One cannot help but notice similarities in the plotlines of the two stories that I have sketched out in the preceding paragraphs—the emerging adult quest for identity as well as the historic Mennonite Brethren search for a firsthand encounter with God. In both cases, there is a heightened awareness of the need for personal responsibility in the context of a plurality of views. Both stories include a narrative of discovery and encounter "for oneself" alongside a subtle (or at times direct) critique of uncritical appropriations of traditional identities, theologies and practices. Both groups are vulnerable to naïve assessments of the past and to overestimations of the competency of the individual to bear extremely heavy theological and existential burdens.

Yet at their best, both stories point toward something that is surely a worthy and even *Christian* goal—namely that of integrating one's *traditions* (what has been *given*) with one's *experience* (what is *encountered*). It has always been the Christian hope that God will meet people at this critical intersection and perhaps a consideration of the challenges of emerging adulthood can provoke contemporary Mennonite Brethren to ask better questions as they try to understand what that meeting might look like today.

Endnotes

1 Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.
2 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 3.
3 Jeffery Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469-480.
4 Robin Marantz Henig, "What is it About 20-Somethings?" *The New York Times,* August 18, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html (accessed September 30, 2010).
5 Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties,"469.
6 Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18.
7 While Arnett sees emerging adulthood largely in positive terms—that is, a time for self-directed exploration and identity formation—others worry that this kind of periodization serves to "infantalize" young adults and exclude them from mainstream cultural and economic decision-making processes. See James E. Côté & Anton L. Allahar, *Critical Youth Studies: A Canadian Focus* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2006), 6.
8 Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age," in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century,* eds. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner (Washington, D.C.: The American Psychological Association, 2006), 4.
9 Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age," 3.
10 Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 56.
11 Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 119-120.
12 Arnett notes similar statistics in Canada and Japan but notes a difference with European countries where access to higher education is more restricted due to earlier and more focused vocational training during the secondary school years. See Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 120.
13 Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 140.
14 Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 138.
15 This conversation, of course, treats marriage as an inevitable aspect of human development and thus runs the considerable risk of marginalizing the experience of single adults. My interest in marriage in this paper is primarily to note the theme of *delay* of markers that have traditionally signified entrance into adulthood. There is also good evidence to suggest that fewer people are even *getting* married today but that phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper. See Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 21.
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Pioneers Once Again: How One Mennonite Brethren Community is Engaging Urban University Students

Rebecca Stanley

The Mennonite Brethren story is a story of adventure, chaos, uncertainty and excitement. While Mennonite Brethren have often worked to woo others into the deep end of the pool, they suddenly find themselves there, excited at their newfound capacity, fearful of the required endurance and uncertain of their destination. Perhaps this is how all pioneers feel. As Mennonite Brethren engage with students and the academic world on the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus, they are seeking to recapture the experience of earlier Mennonite Brethren while forging a new path in the midst of current realities.

A pioneering spirit has guided Mennonite Brethren throughout the past century and a half as they have attempted to move ahead as authentic followers of Jesus in new settings—new countries, new cultures, new fields of study. How did those first Mennonite Brethren feel as they planted themselves in or beside strange societies and considered how they would pass on their knowledge and their worldview to the next generation? What did those early days look like when the doors to their conference's academic institutions opened?

The International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) identifies twenty-eight post-secondary Mennonite Brethren schools around the globe.[1] Canada is the home of five of these schools: Bethany College in Saskatchewan, Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Manitoba, Columbia Bible College (CBC) in British Columbia, École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal (ETEM) in Quebec and satellite campuses of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in British Columbia and Manitoba.

The formation of Mennonite Brethren Bible colleges and schools historically assisted in passing faith and tradition on to the next generation, while "protecting" them from worldviews in academia that

were deemed counter to the ways of Jesus. In the words of former Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary president, J. B. Toews, "the Seminary was born in 1955 because of the vision of the church for trained leadership that could lead wisely, theologically, and above all, biblically in a society that was rushing madly after the gods of learning and mammon."[2]

The thesis of the following paper is as follows: While Mennonite Brethren schools continue to be an integral piece in the journey of their communities, it is critical that Mennonite Brethren must also commit to walking with students in our society's universities and colleges and to engaging actively as a significant voice within the academic world.

Some Canadian Mennonite Brethren schools have found creative ways to connect with provincial universities. Mennonite Brethren Bible College (later Concord College and now amalgamated into CMU) became affiliated with Waterloo Lutheran University in Waterloo, Ontario (now Wilfred Laurier University), and in 1970 it became associated with the University of Winnipeg. Students were able to take up to two years worth of credits at these schools.[3] ETEM has been officially affiliated with the theology department of the University of Montreal since 1992.[4]

A Rationale for University Student Ministry

While a protective mentality seeking to keep Mennonite Brethren youth away from Canada's secular universities may have prospered in some pockets of the Conference, hundreds and thousands of children have enrolled, studied, lived in and graduated from public universities. They have studied in a wide range of fields from languages and humanities, to social and natural sciences, to mathematics, law, arts, political science and engineering. Consider that in November 2009 the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* published statistics that indicate that Canadian Mennonite Brethren post-secondary schools host about twenty-six hundred students each year, many of whom are not from within Mennonite Brethren congregations.[5] Imagine how many more Mennonite Brethren study at Canada's universities and colleges!

Reality of Mass Exodus

There are a number of critical reasons to consider ministry to university students as a priority for the Mennonite Brethren Conference.

First, present reality points to a mass exodus from the church at the critical transition phase into university, although there are no official denominational statistics. However, one of Canada's evangelical denominations recently indicated that over 70% of the children and youth that come into their churches leave by the time they reach the age of 18.[6] Whatever the statistics, they are significant enough to sit up and take notice, especially when some of these are children and grandchildren of Mennonite Brethren. While some of these students leave their faith completely, others leave the church while retaining faith in God, finding it difficult to reconcile their beliefs and practice with the form of church they have experienced. Both types of "leavers" need someone to walk alongside them during this crisis point.

The Youth Transition Network, through its research in the United States, found that 70% of students walk away from the church in transition from high school to university or college and that 26% drop out of college before the end of their freshman year.[7] Two major factors led to these outcomes: *culture shock* and *preparation*. Many of the students they interviewed encountered a level of stress and loneliness that was significant enough to cause culture shock, leaving them susceptible to undiscerning bonding with a foreign culture in a short period of time, essentially bonding to the first thing that invited them in when they left home. Many students also felt unprepared spiritually as well as practically for leaving home, particularly in the areas of changes in the social environment, changes in the academic protocol and management of money.[8]

Young Adult Development

The church cannot act as if the responsibility to students ends the day they graduate from high school. It is critical that churches continue to walk with them through the transitional years of university and college life, a time of deep shaping and profound growth. In her book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Daloz Parks speaks at length about the particular tasks of the young adult phase of life.[9] Although it is not possible to delve deeply into this research within the confines of this paper, it is vital to mention the critical importance of creating mentoring environments. Mentoring communities, in which students can flourish, are significant when they face the necessary journey of asking big questions about who they are, who God is and what this world is all about. It is critical that in community they begin to dream

passionately about their particular calling in this world. Together with the church, students must ask, "What life do we imagine living? and "What do we need to know to be equipped to live this kind of life?"[10]

Holistic discipleship, including the intersection of faith and learning

Another reason to prioritize university student ministry pertains to an understanding of discipleship. Today's generation of young adults can live with paradox in a way that older generations often do not understand, but these same young adults do not desire to live segmented lives. If God is real and relevant for today, then being a follower of Christ must entail following him in every area of life. Back in 1966 J. B. Toews complained of the following:

> There are, sad to say, many Christian students whose faith remains unaffected by the new dimensions of university life. For them, it is not a question of "losing" or "not losing" (their faith) but of obtaining the courses necessary for a degree or a job. A challenging encounter with God is simply not reckoned with, or expected...They will eventually become religious schizophrenics, incapable of integrating their faith with their working situation.[11]

It has been my experience that fewer and fewer Christian students in this generation are willing to live with this type of reality. They either leave their faith behind or pursue a more holistic journey. The church needs to offer a type of discipleship that will inspire the next generation. It is important to help students see and understand the relationship between their faith in God and their academic pursuits. No longer can the church fear discussions pertaining to science, astronomy, psychology, political science or contemporary art. Christian students need to be given the resources to intersect their faith and learning in vital, intelligent and transforming ways.

Unique Mission Field

Finally, Canadian universities and colleges are centers of learning where people from a myriad of nations are deeply influenced and become great influencers. It is a mission field that needs not only the

attention of para-church organizations, such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Campus for Christ, but congregations and faith communities that can model the ways of Jesus and invite students into this holistic journey. In his blog, *Engaging the University*, John Stackhouse urges the local church to engage in generic Christian formation and campus ministry to focus primarily, even exclusively, on the special intrinsic challenges and opportunities of the university for students and university graduates.[12]

What are these unique needs? University students need mentoring and guidance concerning vocation—the human vocation of cultivating the world and the Christian vocation of disciple making. Students need to be taught how to respond to university challenges, such as how to respond to diversity, antagonism, loving your neighbor in particular settings, and how to get the most out of the university experience through disciplines of healthy living, setting good priorities and engaging in local church life. The church can also offer opportunities and resources for mission (on campus, locally and globally) and foster Christian ecumenism on campus.[13] This type of ministry to students walks hand in hand with the discipleship offered in local church settings.

As previously asserted, it is critical that Mennonite Brethren commit to walking with students in society's universities and colleges and to engaging actively as a significant voice within the academic world. While there are some para-church organizations which have ministered to students on campuses with considerable success for decades, there is much more need! For example, based on current personal research, with nearly 47,000 students at UBC, only approximately 500 students are actively involved in all of the evangelical Christian clubs on campus. That's not much more than 1% of the population.

Reasons for Ineffectiveness

The Spring 2008 issue of *Direction* contains some vital material on the history of Mennonite Brethren ministry to university students in British Columbia, as well as broader dialogue on faith and learning issues. These articles, written by contemporary Mennonite Brethren thinkers, are thought-provoking, humbling and inspiring. A couple of the authors ponder the reasons why Mennonite Brethren have been ineffective in ministry to university students in the past. John Friesen mentions three factors:

1. A general withdrawal of churches from the public university system.
2. University teaching is not widely supported as a ministry area of Christian intellectuals.
3. The church views universities as merely foreign mission fields rather than as centers for research and learning, resulting in support being directed towards Bible colleges and educational institutions rather than to programs involving university student ministry.[14]

Gay Lynn Voth highlights some of the Anabaptist and Mennonite tendencies, which hamper relationships with academia, particularly the tendencies toward anticlericalism, pragmatism and pluralism. She challenges Mennonite Brethren to move beyond these issues to imagine and understand "God is God of the whole world, including knowledge and the academy, and not only the God of the church."[15]

A Unique Voice in the Academic World

The need for Mennonite Brethren to commit to walking with students in universities and colleges is evident. It is also critical for Mennonite Brethren to engage actively as a significant voice within the academic world. The values and praxis of Anabaptists are being explored in fresh ways as the church enters a post-Christendom reality in the West. Stuart Murray's, *The Naked Anabaptist,* is an insightful and practical treatise on the significance of the Anabaptist voice in today's society.[16] Here is an "outsider" adopting Anabaptist values, similar to my own experience of not having grown up in a Mennonite culture or church context. I have found in our work on the UBC campus and in the surrounding neighborhood that many Anabaptist values and practices make sense to today's students and urban neighbors. There are many points of contact—community, spiritual journey, peacemaking, team leadership, care for the poor and the marginalized, and the focus on following in the ways of Jesus.

But what do Mennonite Brethren have to offer within the academic world? Some critics have suggested that the Mennonite tradition offers no serious model for interacting with higher education.[17] These critics would consider education to be primarily a matter of the head and see Mennonites as focused on the hands and heart. In a general sense it is true, as one author asserts, that the starting point for

Anabaptists has more to do with holistic living than with cognition and more to do with ethics than with intellect.[18] A faculty member at Goshen College in Indiana recognized this as a model that "transforms thinking by living" while other models, such as the Reformed model, are fundamentally cerebral and transform living by thinking.[19] Yet Mennonite Brethren have much to contribute as higher education begins to understand that human life is more than cognition and as they help students develop every aspect of their being, not only their minds.

In his book, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*, Richard T. Hughes recognizes that "Mennonites prize the life of the mind, but they rarely divorce cognition from lifestyle commitments, grounded in Christian faith. More precisely, Mennonites begin their task by seeking to implement a vision of discipleship that takes its cue from the radical teachings of Jesus."[20] He goes on to identify four ways by which the Mennonite faith tradition can genuinely sustain the life of the mind.

First, sixteenth-century Anabaptism originated in the very womb of dissent. In a world that prized lockstep uniformity, Anabaptists dared to question the status quo. "If a willingness to question conventional wisdom stands at the heart of the academic enterprise, then surely the Anabaptist heritage offers important resources for sustaining the life of the mind."[21]

Second, Mennonites routinely counsel one another to abandon self in the interest of others and to abandon narrow nationalism in the interest of world citizenship. This means that Mennonites, precisely because of their *service orientation*, are prepared to take seriously one of the cardinal virtues of the modern academy—the emphasis on pluralism and diversity.[22] The international studies programs often found in Mennonite colleges, where students serve and learn for an entire semester or year in a third-world culture, is evidence of this value.

Third, Hughes indicates that the ability to engage in critical thinking requires that a person has a place to stand, a perspective or vantage point, but that one's frame of reference must be vulnerable to criticism, that a person can break through the particularity of one's own intellectual foundation as necessary. Hughes recognizes that Mennonites have a strong vantage point based not on a theological abstraction but instead on a story-formed community. He stipulates, "so long as this story-formed community reaches beyond itself to the stranger, to men and women of other cultures and other faith traditions, to orphans

and widows and the despised of the earth—so long as this is true, the Mennonite story is a dialectical one."[23] It affirms a specific faith tradition but reaches beyond itself to men and women who tell stories completely different from theirs. This holds great potential to nurture critical thinking.

Finally, the historic emphasis on *humility* in the Mennonite tradition prepares scholars to embrace one of the cardinal virtues of the academy: the willingness to admit that their understanding is fragmentary and incomplete and that, indeed, they could even be wrong.[24]

In *The Naked Anabaptist*, Murray indicates that while, historically, Anabaptists have been accused of "being anti-intellectual, denigrating scholarship and education, and of operating with an unsophisticated approach to the Bible and to theology," ironically, Anabaptists today are sometimes accused of being too intellectual.[25] He supposes that one of the reasons may be that the twentieth century recovery of the Anabaptist vision owes so much to Mennonite scholars.[26] Those who are adopting Anabaptist values and theology have not necessarily lived within Anabaptist communities where the practical out-workings of convictions and values are explored. It is my hope that the chasm between these two groups—the intellectuals who are discussing Anabaptism theoretically and the "on the ground" communities themselves—can speak into each other's worlds creating a type of practical yet cerebral, pastoral and academic vision as they move ahead.

It is my personal conviction that Mennonite Brethren have much to offer in the wider academic world. Theirs is a unique voice that will be both invited to the table and scorned. I have been interacting on the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus for only a year and a half but what I have found so far is a real openness to who Mennonite Brethren are as followers of Jesus. I have had a law professor who acknowledged that Mennonite Brethren have much to contribute as they begin to develop a "social justice" arm at the UBC Law School. This past spring Regent College held a pastors' conference focused on the relationship between faith and science, attempting to bridge the gap between pastors and the scientific world in a small way. Recently, I attended a day seminar with 200 UBC staff members who work in student support roles, and I participated in discussions about how to see students as whole people, including spiritual persons, in the midst of their studies and about the role of faith communities in addressing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety as students endeavor to relate their learning to life.

Will Mennonite Brethren take the time to build relationships within the academic world and engage in issues that have meaning within society? Are their hearts compelled by the love of Christ to walk with students, faculty and staff in the unique environment of higher education? Do Mennonite Brethren believe their voice is critical? Do they also have the humility to join in the conversation rather than create their own parallel but often unheard dialogue?

Our Story on the University of British Columbia Campus

In conclusion, I offer a glimpse into the local story on the UBC campus. This account, which takes place on the west side of the city of Vancouver, is but one exploration of how a local faith community, along with its provincial Mennonite Brethren Conference, can begin to take steps towards walking with students in society's universities and colleges, and begin to believe that it is called to engage actively as a significant voice within the academic world.

Although my story begins less than three year ago, the journey of Mennonite Brethren ministering to students at UBC began over forty years ago. In 1958 the British Columbia Mennonite Brethren Conference appointed Henry Regehr as a full-time youth worker in Vancouver. The Regehrs' Sunday afternoon discussion groups were popular as students engaged in lively conversation on topics involving the integration of Christianity and academic disciplines, and of course, ate food together. After a few years, the Mennonite Brethren leadership asked the Regehrs to discontinue the discussion groups and replace them with Bible studies and prayer meetings, which resulted in considerable misunderstanding and conflict.[27] The Regehrs' experience clearly illustrates a marked contrast in attitudes towards faith and learning. As Friesen notes, "students valued free discussion and honest intellectual inquiry, while the church leadership felt uneasy with this approach."[28]

In 1967 a church was established to take the needs at UBC seriously, but after a few years the fellowship dissolved due to a lack of leadership. There were several further attempts to present visions to the Conference but nothing was ever implemented.[29] In 1986 a group of local Mennonites took matters into their own hands, mortgaged their own houses and purchased the building that has served as the Menno Simons Centre for nearly twenty-five years.[30] Several hundred students have since lived at the Centre and experienced the warmth and

acceptance of an intentional Christian community. It has also been the home of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship and more recently, Urban Journey, a new Mennonite Brethren church plant.[31]

Two and half years ago, my husband Andrew and I, along with our three children, moved to the Dunbar neighborhood of Vancouver, just east of the UBC campus, to serve as church planters. We arrived very much like missionaries (although I personally was born in Vancouver, as were my parents and grandparents). The first year was spent as interns with another church plant in South Vancouver, Faithwerks led by Nick Suen, and beginning to live deeply in the Dunbar neighborhood.[32] We knew from the beginning that working with students (and faculty and staff) on the UBC campus would be a big part of our ministry here. However, we also knew that planting a campus-based church would be difficult to sustain over the long run. So we began this two-tracked journey of watching God start a new church community from scratch, as well as discovering ways to connect on the UBC campus and partner with those already serving there.

As we researched the UBC community, we discovered the UBC Chaplaincy Association, a multi-faith association working under the umbrella of UBC's Student Development staff.[33] I was invited to serve as a UBC chaplain representing the Mennonite Brethren faith stream, which gave us formal permission to serve on the campus and access to students in a variety of ways. While the association itself is multi-faith and events we plan together must reflect this, each chaplain has the freedom to serve within and represent their own faith stream.

Because some concrete building opportunities have come up over the last year—with the potential of creating a ministry house or Mennonite Brethren Centre on the UBC campus—we have worked with the provincial conference to create a committee of people invested in university student ministry. As we have moved ahead step by step, envisioning the future, and working to lay a foundation for ministry on the campus, we have discovered that God is moving others within the Mennonite Brethren Conference to reengage British Columbian campuses. It has been exciting to hear about the dreams and ministry visions that are being birthed, to learn together as we slowly move ahead, building on the legacy left by those who have championed this cause for decades. Presently, we work on the campus in four ways: 1) through the role on the UBC Chaplaincy Association; 2) through our connections with Regent College (as an alumni and through a number of Regent students who are part of the Urban Journey community); 3)

in partnership with other chaplains as well as Christian student clubs; and 4) alongside the Resident Coordinators of the Menno Simons Centre.

While this ministry is larger than Urban Journey, as we seek to partner with other local churches, it will also be rooted deeply in a local faith community because of our missional and discipleship values. We sense that we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg as we serve as urban missionaries in the Dunbar/UBC neighborhoods. We are both humbled and impassioned as we consider the opportunities ahead of us. And we invite others on this journey with us, as those who seek to walk with students on our college and university campuses and rediscover the unique and vital voice that Mennonite Brethren bring to the academic world.

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Andrew Dyck is the executive secretary of the bi-national Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, pastoral coach and teacher at Highland Community Church (Abbotsford, BC), and adjunct lecturer at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Andrew has pastored for the last fifteen years and taught several courses at Columbia Bible College. Andrew and his wife Martha have three adult sons and live in Abbotsford, BC.

Abraham Friesen is distinguished professor of history emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Abraham was chair of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission for some fifteen years. Some of his more recent books include *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Eerdmans, 1998); *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State before and during World War I* (Kindred Productions, 2006); and *Reformers, Radicals, and Revolutionaries* (Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2011). Abraham and his wife Gerry live in Fresno, CA and have one son.

César García is the newly appointed general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference. Previously, César served as a church planter in Bogotá (Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas Torre Fuerte) and worked for six years at a Christian radio station. He was chair of the Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia (Mennonite Brethren Churches of Colombia) from 2002 to 2008 and currently is the secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Mission Commission. César and his wife Sandra Báez have two daughters and live in Bogotá, Colombia.

Tim Geddert is professor of New Testament at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (Fresno, CA). He is also an adjunct instructor at Bienenberg Biblical Seminary (Switzerland) and a member of the US Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life. Tim's books include *Mark*, a commentary in the Believers Church Series (Herald Press, 2001); *Double Take* (Kindred Books, 2008); and *All Right Now* (Herald Press, 2008). Tim and his wife Gertrud live in Fresno, CA and have six children.

Bruce L. Guenther is the interim president and associate professor of church history and Mennonite studies at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary Canada. Previously, Bruce taught as an adjunct in numerous universities, seminaries and Bible colleges in Canada. He has published numerous articles on Canadian evangelical Protestants, Mennonite history and the history of theological education in Canada. Bruce and his wife Lois have three children and live in Abbotsford, BC.

Ray Harms-Wiebe is the global program team leader for MB Mission. Previously, Ray and his wife Judy served with MB Mission in São Paulo, Brazil for eighteen years where they worked in the areas of university ministry, church planting and leadership training. Ray also wrote *Intimidade com Deus:O Caminho de Volta* (United Press, 2000). Ray and Judy have three daughters and live in Abbotsford, BC.

Doug Heidebrecht is currently working in an international setting. Previously, he served as director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Winnipeg) and for sixteen years as instructor in biblical and theological studies at Bethany College. Doug co-edited *The Voice of a Writer: Honoring the Life of Katie Funk Wiebe* (Kindred Productions, 2010) with Valerie Rempel. Doug and his wife Sherry have two adult children.

Jonathan (J) Janzen is lead pastor at Highland Community Church (Abbotsford, BC). J has recently served as the interim editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald.* J and his wife Andrea live in Abbotsford, BC with their four children.

Lynn Jost is vice president and dean of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (Fresno, CA) and professor of Old Testament and homiletics. Lynn previously served as president of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. He was also professor of biblical studies at Tabor College and pastor of the Hesston Mennonite Brethren Church in Kansas. Lynn co-authored *Family Matters* (Kindred Productions, 2002) with Connie Faber. Lynn and his wife Donna have two adult children and live in Fresno, CA.

Richard Lougheed is librarian and lecturer at École de théologie évangélique de Montréal and L'Institut Biblique V.I.E. (Montreal, QC). Previously, Richard served for fourteen years as professor of church history and Old Testament at the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique, and seven years as the pastor of a joint United Church and Anglican parish in Rouyn-Noranda. Richard and his wife Margaret have two sons and two daughters and live in Montreal, QC.

Alfred Neufeld is the newly appointed Rector of the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay, chair of the Board of Mennonite Brethren media ministry in Paraguay and chair of the Faith and Life Commission for the Mennonite World Conference. Alfred served previously as director of the Instituto Biblico Asunción, dean of the Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay and as a visiting professor at the Basel-Bienenberg Mennonite Seminary in Switzerland. Alfred's books include *Vivir desde el Futuro de Dios* (Kairos, 2006); *Contra la Sagrada Resignación* (El Lector, 2006); *Efesios, Iglesia Humana con Propósitos Divinos* (Facultad de Teología UEP, 2006); and *What We Believe Together* (Good Books, 2007). Alfred and his wife Wilma have four adult children and live in Asunción, Paraguay.

Keith Reed serves as the associate pastor of Jericho Ridge Community Church (Langley, BC). His primary responsibilities include discipleship and pastoral care. Keith and his wife Melissa have one son and live in Surrey, BC.

Sam Reimer is professor of sociology at Crandall University (Moncton, NB). Sam is a member at large on the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference Executive Board and has published *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). Sam and his wife Mary Beth live with their three children in Moncton, NB.

Valerie G. Rempel is associate dean and associate professor of history and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (Fresno, CA) and has recently been appointed as the inaugural director of the Center for Anabaptist Studies at Fresno Pacific University. Valerie co-edited *The Voice of a Writer: Honoring the Life of Katie Funk Wiebe* (Kindred Productions, 2010) with Doug Heidebrecht. Valerie is a member of the Faith and Life Commission of the Mennonite World Conference and lives in Fresno, CA.

Rebecca Stanley, along with her husband Andrew, serve as church planters of Urban Journey (Vancouver, BC) and as Mennonite Brethren chaplains within the University of British Columbia Chaplaincy Association. Rebecca is also attending Law School at the University of British Columbia. She has ministered in local Mennonite Brethren church settings, at Columbia Bible College and with MB Mission over the last decade. Rebecca and Andrew have three school-aged children and live in Vancouver, BC.

Brad Sumner serves as founding and lead pastor at Jericho Ridge Community Church (Langley, BC). He also serves on the BC Mennonite Brethren Pastoral Ministries Committee and is an adjunct instructor at Columbia Bible College. Brad and his wife Meghan have two school-aged children and live in Langley, BC.

Larry Warkentin is professor emeritus at Fresno Pacific University (Fresno, CA). He is a composer, pianist, and writer with several of his hymns found in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, which is used in many Mennonite congregations. He has recently published an historical novel entitled *Bloodline: Of Peasants, Pilgrims and Poets* (Xlibris, 2011), which follows a family from the village of Warken, The Netherlands in the year 1230 until the present. Larry and his wife Paula live in Fresno, CA.

The 150th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren provides an opportunity to reflect critically about the journey they have travelled as well as the path they are on now. Since their beginning on January 6, 1860, the recurring themes of identity and mission emerge in their attempts to articulate the centre that holds Mennonite Brethren together.

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"For 150 years the Mennonite Brethren Church has retained its core commitments, even as it evolved and borrowed from other evangelical traditions. These essays examine issues of identity as they review this story, but always with an eye to mission and the future of this people. Remaining faithful to the call of God and the mission of God requires careful thinking - thanks to the authors for their contribution to this agenda."

— Gerald Gerbrandt, President, Canadian Mennonite University

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